

Master's Thesis

Exploring the Mediating Effect of Organizational Identification on Applicants' Reactions and Recommendation Intentions

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This is the full text of my master's thesis, shared as a living document. Formatting is being refined.

Abstract

This study investigates the mediating effect of organizational identification (OID) on the relationship between applicants' reactions and recommendation intentions. Despite extensive research on applicant reactions, the underlying mechanisms linking applicant experiences to behavioral outcomes such as recommendation intentions remain underexplored. Drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985) and the group value model (Lind & Tyler, 1988), and building upon previous work on applicant reactions (Gilliland, 1993; Bauer et al., 2001), this study extends the theoretical lens by positioning OID as a mediator in the applicant reactions process. Survey data were collected from 98 real job seekers recruited via LinkedIn and analyzed using path analysis with 1,000 bootstrapped resamples in lavaan. Perceived organizational prestige, number of jobs applied for, and years of work experience were included as control variables. Results revealed that interpersonal treatment was the only applicant-reaction subscale that significantly predicted OID ($\beta = 0.904$, $p < .001$), whereas process fairness and outcome fairness did not contribute unique predictive variance when all three dimensions were modeled simultaneously. OID, in turn, significantly predicted recommendation intentions ($\beta = 0.223$, $p = .003$), and the indirect effect of interpersonal treatment on recommendation intentions through OID was significant ($\beta = 0.202$, $p = .006$, 95% CI [0.074, 0.355]), indicating complementary partial mediation. These findings suggest that the interpersonal treatment of applicants during the selection process is the primary driver of organizational identification and, through it, of

recommendation behavior. The study contributes to applicant reactions research by establishing OID as a viable mediating mechanism, by identifying interpersonal treatment as the specific dimension that activates it, and by highlighting the growing importance of interpersonal treatment quality in recruitment as organizations increasingly adopt automated and AI-enabled selection systems.

Keywords: applicant reactions; organizational identification; interpersonal treatment; recommendation intentions; organizational justice; AI-enabled selection

Exploring the Mediating Effect of Organizational Identification on Applicants' Reactions and Recommendation Intentions Job applicants have low trust in their prospective employers. According to Gartner (2023), only 54% of candidates trust organizations to be honest during the interview process. The Gartner Candidate Survey revealed that one in two job applicants backed out of an accepted offer in the last 12 months (Gartner, 2023). On the other hand, according to 2024 recruiting trends by LinkedIn (LinkedIn, 2024), based on their survey with thousands of recruiting professionals and talent leaders, candidate experience is one of the top topics that will shape the future of talent acquisition in the next five years. Research has consistently shown a strong positive relationship between organizational justice and trust within organizations (Colquitt, et al., 2001). When people are treated fairly by the organization, the perceived organizational justice significantly and positively affects people's organizational trust and organizational identification. (Chen et al., 2015). Applicants' reactions research emerged in the 1980s to study how job applicants respond to various aspects of the recruitment and selection process (Rynes, et al., 1980). Applicant reaction research gained momentum in the 1990s when Gilliland (1993) published his classic organizational justice model of the applicant reaction process, which is still the most influential applicant reaction model. For the first time, he established a comprehensive model of applicants' reactions by applying procedural justice to the selection system and distributive justice to hiring decisions. Since then, scholars have developed studies that applied other theories to applicants' reactions. The most applied theories are expectations, fairness heuristic, and attrition theories (McCarthy, et al., 2017).

Although the field of applicants' reactions has been continuously active, it has come to a critical juncture for the further future progress of the theory (McCarthy et al., 2017). Compared to other theories that started booming around the turn of the 21st century, such as engagement and well-being, the applicants' reaction theory stagnated regarding theoretical development, empirical research, and practical application. McCarthy et al. (2017) indicated that extension of the theoretical lens is needed in future research on applicants' reactions. Researchers should explore

additional theoretical mechanisms that underlie the relationship between applicant reactions and key relationships and variables that previously have been overlooked. There is also a need to translate these findings into practical recommendations. This study contributes to the field by exploring organizational identification as a mediator of applicant reactions to recommendation intentions. Applying for a job is a process where job applicants become an organizational member. From a social identity theory (SIT) perspective, it is a process in which people view themselves as being members of a particular group or social category (Edward, 2005), namely the organization for which they have applied to work. Organizational identification is an important component of social identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Surprisingly, applicants' reaction research with a social identity lens remains relatively rare. Herriot (2004) proposed a theoretical framework using social identity theory to predict applicants' reactions to selection processes. He argued that job applicants decide if they should continue or exit the selection process based on a matching process to assess if their social identity is congruent with their perception of the organizational identity. The relationship between identity congruence and exit intentions is further moderated by the availability of alternative jobs in the labor market and applicants' needs for self-esteem. Herriot argued that identity theory could explain a broader range of phenomena of applicant reactions than justice

theory. Gilliland and Steiner (2012) also posit that the social identity model provides additional ways of furthering understanding of the underlying process of applicant reactions that are not suggested by organizational justice theory. However, more than 10 years later, McCarthy et al. (2017) indicate that most applicant reaction theories are based on expectations, fairness heuristics, and attributions, while SIT has been a less commonly applied theoretical framework in the field of applicants' reactions. Even Herriot admitted that methodological challenges must be addressed before propositions regarding application reactions based on identity theory could be supported (Herriot, 2004). To address this challenge, Gilliland and Steiner argue that the social identity theory of applicant reactions proposed by Herriot (2024) is completely consistent with the group-value model, an important theory of organizational justice research. The group-value model suggests that people care about their standing in the group: "Inter-personal treatment during social interactions gives people information about their status within the group." (Tyler, 1989, p. 831) In other words, fair treatment provides information that they are respected and valued by the group. In the case of the selection process, when people apply for a job, they wish to be part of the organization; although they are not yet part of the organizational group, the fair treatment during the selection process also communicates information that they are highly valued by the group for which applicant wishes to join. However, similar to the social identity theory of applicant reactions, research addressing group-value motives in applicant reactions is rather limited

(Gilliland & Steiner, 2012). One way in which social identity theory and group-value model have been examined in organizations is through organizational identification (OID). Organizational identification is defined as "Organizational identification is defined as a perceived oneness with an organization

and the experience of the organization's successes and failures as one's own." (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Mael & Ashforth, 1992) In the context of selection, OID reflects the degree to which applicants perceive themselves as aligned with the organization, a perception that can emerge even prior to formal membership. One might argue that OID may not apply to job applicants as they are not yet members of the organization. However, previous empirical research shows that one's OID begins early in the employment life cycle (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Others go further and claim that one's OID starts during the selection process before one joins the organization (Griepentrog, Harold, Holtz, Klimoski & Marsh, 2012). Turner (1984) proposed the term psychological group, which he defined as "a collection of people who share the same social identification or define themselves in terms of the same social category membership" (p. 530). A member of a psychological group does not need to interact with other members or be accepted by other members. For example, alumni and sports team fans do not need to directly interact with the school or team to feel identification with that group. While Herriot (2004) focuses on how intentions to exit or continue the selection process and intentions to accept or reject a job offer are predicted by organizational identity, this study will focus on application recommendations, which are defined as the likelihood that applicants will recommend the organization to others (Gilliland, 1993). On the one hand, according to Herriot (2004), the relationship between organizational identity and organizational outcomes is moderated by three variables: applicants' perception of the availability and attainability of alternative jobs, the applicants' current identities, and applicants' degree of tolerance of organizational identity incongruence. The decision to accept or reject a job offer can be influenced by more tangible factors related to the job and organization (Chapman & Webster, 2006). Intuitively, someone would not refuse a good job offer because of an unfair interview

unless he/she has better alternatives (Gilliland & Steiner, 2012). On the other hand, McCarthy et al. (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of 145 applicant reaction studies since 2000 and found the relationship between procedural fairness and recommendation intentions had the largest effect size ($r = .46$) of all outcomes. Applicants' alternate job opportunities, hiring expectations, and stage in the selection process can moderate their reactions to the selection process and subsequent outcomes (Gilliland, 1993). However, these moderators are less likely to influence recommendation intentions because even if the applicant decides not to accept the offer, they

may still recommend the organization to others through word-of-mouth (Hausknecht, et al., 2004). The primary research question of this study is: To what extent does organizational identification mediate the relationship between applicants' reactions and intention to recommend? The study contributes to applications' reactions research by extending the theoretical lens of OID to help explain the impact of applicant reactions. Twenty years have passed since Herriot (2004) proposed social identity theory as a framework for understanding applicants' reactions to selection processes; this study advances the research by exploring the mediating effects of organizational identification on applicants' reactions to organizational outcomes with group value theory as a framework. Another contribution is providing practical implications and evidence-based recommendations for human resources professionals, as our data collection and analysis will be based on real job seekers from work populations rather than students. Applicant Reactions Applicants' reactions research emerged in the 1980s to study how job applicants respond to various aspects of the recruitment and selection process (Rynes et al., 1980). Rynes et al.

1980. was the first research on individual reactions to organizational recruiting, focusing on the influence of recruiting representatives, administrative practices, and evaluation procedures on job seekers' attitudes and behaviors. The research found that applicants prefer interviews with high "face" validity, focusing on job-related qualifications and tasks, and job-related pre-employment tests, such as work sample tests, because these procedures are seen as fairer and more valid. The research also found that job attributes (e.g., salary, location, type of work) significantly predict applicants' reactions. (Rynes et al., 1980). As stated above, applicant reaction theory gained momentum in the 1990s when Gilliland (1993) published his classic model of applicant reaction based on organizational justice theory, which established a theoretical foundation for applicant reaction research. For the first time, he established a comprehensive model of applicants' reactions by applying procedural justice to the selection system and distributive justice to hiring decisions. Gilliland (1993) identified ten procedural rules that determine how applicants perceive the fairness of a selection procedure. These rules are grouped into three groups: (1) formal characteristics of selection procedures, (2) explanations offered, and (3) interpersonal treatment in the hiring process. The model shows that applicants' perception of overall fairness influences key outcomes such as job acceptance intentions and application recommendations. Since then, Gilliland's model has guided much of the subsequent research on applicant reactions (McCarthy et al., 2017). Outcomes of Applicant Reactions Gilliland (1993) chronologically categorized key outcomes predicted by applicant reactions into reactions during hiring (job-application and job-acceptance decisions, application recommendations, test motivation, and legal battles) and reactions after hiring

(performance, organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, and organizational climate). The study

included an additional outcome of self-perceptions (self-esteem, Self-efficacy, and future jobsearch intentions). Hausknecht et al. (2004) proposed an updated theoretical model of applicant reactions and tested the model using meta-analysis. The study synthesized results from 86 independent samples involving 48,750 participants and showed a strong positive relationship between procedural justice and recommendation intentions. Although research has demonstrated that applicants who perceive the selection process as fair are significantly more likely to recommend the employer to others, research to date has offered little explanation for why this relationship exists and has not examined the mediating mechanisms that explain this relationship. This study will address this limitation by proposing organizational identification as a potential mediator, suggesting that one's organizational identity begins during the selection process before one joins the organization. When individuals apply for a job, they wish to join the organizational group. Fair treatment during the selection process communicates information that they are valued by the group, and the perceived organizational identification based on fairness reactions leads to recommending the organization to others. We start by reviewing social identity theory, which provides the theoretical foundation for organizational identification. Social Identity Theory and Organizational Identification Social Identity Theory (SIT) is a psychological framework that explains how individuals derive a sense of identity from their perceived membership in various social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). The theory has significant applications in organizational behavior, offering insights into how employees relate to their workplace and colleagues. According to Tajfel and Turner (1985), there are four main components of SIT. First, social categorization refers to classification into various social categories, such as organizational membership, religious

affiliation, gender, and age cohort. Second, social identification is defined as the perception of oneness with or belongingness to a group; people define themselves in terms of the groups they identify themselves with. Third, social comparison involves people comparing their group (ingroup) with other groups (out-group) to maintain or enhance their self-esteem. This comparison often leads to in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. Forth, self-concept refers to selfconcept or self-image which involves personal identity and several social identities (Edwards, 2005). To sum up, social identification is the perception of belongingness to a group classification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). It provides a partial answer to the question, "Who am I?" (e.g., 'I am Chinese', 'I am an alumnus of the University of Chicago'). OID is a specific form of social identification in which an individual defines his or herself as a member of an organization. OID is

defined as a perceived oneness with an organization and the experience of the organization's successes and failures as one's own. It involves the individual defining themselves in terms of their membership in a particular organization, feeling psychologically intertwined with the fate of the group, and sharing a common destiny with it (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Dutton et al. (1994) suggest that an individual will have strong OID when his or her identity as an organizational member is more salient than other identities, and when his or her self-concept shares the characteristics of that group. Mael and Ashforth (1992) claim that there are four aspects of the conception of OID. First, OID is viewed as a perceptual or cognitive construct that is not necessarily associated with any specific behaviors or affective states. Second, OID is relational and comparative, defining the individual relative to other individuals in other categories (e.g., the category of male becomes meaningful only in relation to the category of female). Third, individuals identify partly to enhance self-esteem and tend to invest more of their self-concept in valued personas, which can be painful if

the group encounters failure. Fourth, while classifications tend to be categorical (one is male or female), the intensity of one's identification with a classification is a matter of degree. Van Dick (2001) describes OID by extending the concept within the framework of SIT. He argues that OID consists of four sub-components. First, the affective component involves emotional attachment to the organization, where employees feel a sense of belonging and emotional connection. Second, the cognitive component refers to the knowledge and awareness of being a member of the organization, including self-categorization as part of the organization. Third, the evaluative component includes positive evaluations of the organization, such as feelings of pride in being associated with the organization. Fourth, the behavioral (conative) component involves actual behaviors that reflect identification, such as participation in organizational activities and actions that support the organization. Van Dick's work significantly broadens the conceptual boundaries of OID by incorporating these components, particularly adding the behavioral aspect as a key component of a broader model of OID and linking OID to actual actions and participation in the organization. This comprehensive approach helps to better understand the multifaceted nature of OID and its implications for employee behavior and organizational outcomes.

Mael and Ashforth (1992) indicate that there are three organizational antecedents of OID. First, organizational distinctiveness refers to the perceived distinctiveness of the organization's values and practices relative to those of comparable groups. Distinctiveness differentiates the organization from others and provides a sharper and more salient definition for organizational members. Second, perceived organizational prestige plays a crucial role in enhancing self-esteem through identification. The more prestigious the organization, the greater the potential

boost to self-esteem for its members. Third, competition between the organization (in-group) and other organizations (out-group) helps draw group boundaries more sharply and highlights values and norms, making it easier to identify with the organization. Social Identity and Applicants' Reactions Herriot (2004) suggested that applicants' social identity predicts their reactions regarding the recruiting organization. He argued that applicants decide if they should continue or exit the selection process based on a matching process to assess if their social identity is congruent with their perceptions of organizational identity. In other words, applicants decide to exit the selection process when their beliefs, values, and norms of behaviors (BVNs) associated with their social identity do not fit with their perception of the BVNs associated with the organizational identity demonstrated by the recruiters. Gartner's (2023) study indicated that among those who backed out of a job offer, nine in ten had withdrawn from the hiring process because they felt a mismatch between the employer brand communicated and their preferences. This showed real-world evidence that backs Herriot's (2004) social identity application to applicants' reactions. Herriot (2004) also argued that the relationship between congruence and intentions to exit will be moderated by the availability of alternative jobs in the labor market and applicants' needs

for self-esteem. Based on Herriot's (2004) theory, Banks, et al. (2016) further proposed an applied theoretical model that illustrates how social identities mediate the relationships between predictor variables of applicant attraction and outcomes. The mediation model begins with identity activation, where the recruiting process activates job applicants' identities (BVNs) through recruitment signals such as job type and compensation. This is followed by the identity evaluation and identification processes that resemble the matching process between applicants' social identities and an employer's organizational identity, as described in Herriot's (2004) theory. Positive evaluation leads to favorable applicant attraction (apply, pursuit), when job applicants' identity overlaps with that of the organization (identification). In contrast, negative evaluation leads to unfavorable applicant attraction when job applicants' identity and organization identity are separated (disidentification) (Banks et al., 2016). Although applicant attraction may seem to be a similar construct to applicant reactions, it is fundamentally different. Applicant attraction is viewed from the organization's perspective of how an organization can attract job applicants with its organizational branding and job terms (compensation, benefits), whereas applicant reactions are from job candidates' perspectives of how job applicants view the selection process and whether they are treated fairly in the process. To sum up, job applicants seek to join a prospective organization when they apply for an organization. Job applicants evaluate their perceived organization identity of the organization by the BVNs demonstrated by the recruiters that they interact with during the selection process (Herriot, 2004). Mael and Ashforth (1992) tested a

model where organizational identification (OID) mediated the relationship between organizational antecedents and organizational consequences. The organizational antecedents included both organizational factors (such as organizational

prestige) and individual factors (such as organizational tenure). The organizational consequences encompassed financial contributions, recommending the school to others, and participation in organizational functions. Overall, their study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing alumni identification with their alma mater and the potential benefits of fostering strong organizational identification. Similarly, the current study explores how organizational identification may mediate the influence of applicants' reactions on organizational outcomes such as recommendation intentions. Group Value Model and Applicants' Reactions The Group Value Model explains why different components of fairness are important to people (Gilliland, 2018). Lind and Tyler (1988) suggest that procedural and interactional justice provide evidence of an individual's standing in the group. Fair procedures are important not only for their instrumental value in achieving short-term favorable outcomes but also because they provide important information about an individual's social identity and status within a group, which leads to long-term beneficial outcomes. The group value model suggests that people consider three factors when evaluating the fairness of procedures. First, the neutrality of the decision-making process refers to an unbiased decision-making process, as people know they cannot always have what they want (short-term outcome favorability). Still, over time, everyone will benefit from fair procedures. Second, trust in the third party involves the belief that the third party has good intentions and treats people fairly because people are in an organization for the long term, and they predict the future based on current interactions. Third, formal standing in the group and how they are treated during social interactions provide information about their status as group members (Lind & Tyler, 1989). Just like OID, this study is the first attempt to use the group value model to understand

how perceptions of fairness influence applicants' reactions and behavioral outcomes toward selection decisions.

Hypothesis Development

To sum up the current review, applicants' reactions regarding recruiting organizations are predicted by the extent to which applicants' salient social identities are congruent with their perceptions of the organization's identity (Herriot, 2004). How one is treated fairly and respectfully during the selection process determines whether one wants to accept membership when offered

and/or whether one wants to recommend it to others (Gilliland & Steiner, 2012). People care about neutrality, trust, and standing because their group status and membership will be threatened (Tyler, 1989) if they are treated unfairly; this leads to three main hypotheses that this study will test: Hypothesis 1: Applicants' reactions, including (a) Process Fairness, (b) Outcome Fairness, and (c) Interpersonal Treatment, are positively related to their perceptions of OID. Hypothesis 2: Applicants' perceptions of OID are positively related to recommendation intentions. Hypothesis 3: Applicants' perceptions of OID mediate the relationship between applicant reactions of process fairness (a), outcome fairness (b), and interpersonal treatment (c) and recommendation intentions.

Method

This study used a self-reported survey method to investigate the mediation effect of OID between applicants' reactions and intentions to recommend. We used path analysis to test the mediation model.

Participants Participants were recruited via LinkedIn, the world's largest professional social media platform. The participation invitation was posted on LinkedIn and sent directly to people who are available for convenient sampling via email. All participants had prior full-time work experience and had applied for a job within the past 24 months. A total of 241 participants' responses were collected on Qualtrics. Of the 241 initial responses collected, 143 were excluded sequentially due to incomplete or missing surveys ($n = 103$), failure to provide informed consent ($n = 1$), not having applied for a job within the past two years ($n = 7$), no full-time work experience ($n = 8$), and failed data quality review ($n = 24$; including duplicate/bot responses, failed attention checks, and insufficient open-ended responses), resulting in a final analytic sample of $N = 98$. The high exclusion rate (59.3%) is consistent with known data-quality challenges associated with LinkedIn-based survey recruitment, in which bot responses, duplicate submissions, and inattentive responses are commonly reported. The final sample consisted of 98 participants (51.0% female, 48.0% male, 1.0% preferred not to say). The mean age was 32.32 years ($SD = 7.64$, range = 20–61). The sample was racially and ethnically diverse: 48.0% identified as White ($n = 47$), 17.3% as Asian ($n = 17$), 14.3% as Black or African American ($n = 14$), 11.2% as Hispanic or Latino ($n = 11$), 6.1% as American Indian or Alaska Native ($n = 6$), 1.0% as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander ($n = 1$), and 2.0% as Other or Multiracial ($n = 2$). Most participants (75.5%) were U.S. citizens, with 9.2% holding permanent residency, 9.2% on work visas, and 6.1% reporting other nationality status. Regarding work experience, participants reported a mean of 8.79 years ($SD =$

6.47, range = 1–40) and had applied to an average of 6.60 jobs in the past two years (SD = 10.11, range = 1–

55). At the time of the survey, 69.4% were employed full-time, 21.4% part-time, 6.1% selfemployed or other, and 3.1% were not currently employed. With respect to the job application referenced in the survey, 30.6% had applied within the past month, 25.5% within 1–3 months, 15.3% within 3–6 months, 12.2% within 6–12 months, and 16.3% over a year ago. In terms of recall confidence, 46.9% reported being very confident, 36.7% somewhat confident, 12.2% neutral, 3.1% not very confident, and 1.0% not at all confident. Thus, 83.7% of participants expressed at least moderate confidence in their ability to accurately recall their application experience. To confirm that data screening did not introduce systematic bias, the retained sample ($n = 98$) was compared to excluded participants on demographic and experience variables. Of the 143 excluded participants, only those with complete and valid demographic data were included in this comparison ($ns = 40$ – 43). Welch's t -tests and chi-square tests revealed no significant differences between the two groups on age, jobs applied, work experience, gender, ethnicity, nationality, application recency, or recall confidence (all $ps > .05$), indicating that the retained and excluded participants were not significantly different. The only exception was employment status ($\chi^2(3) = 21.69$, $p < .001$), with retained participants more likely to be employed full-time (69.4%) compared to excluded participants (28.6%). This difference is expected given that fulltime work experience was an eligibility requirement of the study — participants who lacked such experience were systematically screened out, and therefore the difference in employment status reflects the study's screening design rather than a meaningful threat to the validity of the final sample. A statistical power analysis was conducted using Cohen and Cohen's (1983) f^2 statistic to evaluate the adequacy of the sample size. Based on the obtained $R^2 = .685$ for the full model

predicting recommendation intentions, the effect size was $f^2 = 2.17$, which exceeds Cohen's (1988) threshold for a large effect ($f^2 \geq .35$). With six predictors, a sample size of $N = 98$ ($v = 91$ degrees of freedom), and $\alpha = .05$, the achieved statistical power was 1.00, indicating that the sample of 98 participants was sufficient to reliably detect the observed effects. The sampling method distinguishes this research from most previous research, which often uses student data based on hypothetical rather than real experiences. Procedures After IRB approval was obtained, we recruited participants through the above-mentioned platforms through postings and direct emails. The recruited participants received a consent form informing them of the voluntary nature of their participation and the confidentiality of their responses. After the participants indicated approval on the consent form, they started the online survey created on Qualtrics. At the beginning of the survey, participants received detailed instructions in writing regarding the

purpose of the study. Participants were asked to think about one of the recently completed job application procedures that they had experienced and answer the survey questions accordingly. They briefly described the application process and indicated when it occurred. They then responded to a series of questions regarding that particular job search experience. The survey was organized into four sections, including three independent variables (i.e., process fairness, outcome fairness, interpersonal treatment) of applicants' reactions, one outcome variable (i.e., recommendation intention), the mediator (organizational identification), and control variables (i.e., perceived organizational prestige and demographics). Given the self-report nature of the survey, we inserted attention check questions between sections of the survey.

Measurement All measures are based on established scales. See Appendix for a complete list of all measures.

Applications reactions Applications' reactions were measured with the scales developed by Gilliland et al. (2001) regarding their reaction to the most recent job application experience (5-point scale, 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). For this study, we measured three factors: process fairness (4 items, e.g., "Whether or not I got the job, I feel the selection process was fair," $\alpha = .93$), outcome fairness (4 items, e.g., "Overall, I feel the results of the selection process were fair," $\alpha = .81$), and interpersonal treatment (4 items, e.g., "I was treated with a high degree of respect and sincerity," $\alpha = .88$).

Organizational identification Mael and Ashforth's (1992) short scale with six-item was used to measure organizational identification (OID). The variables were modified for use in working organization (e.g., "When someone criticizes [name of company], it feels like a personal insult."). According to Edwards (2005), Mael and Ashforth's (1992) scale is one of the most used measurements with an alpha of 0.89 for this study.

Recommendation intentions Recommendation intentions were assessed using items adapted from Gilliland et al. (2001) (5-point scale, e.g., "I would recommend this company to my friends," 5 = strongly agree). Because recommendations are now often communicated via social media, which was not the case when Gilliland and colleagues developed their scale, two additional items were included to specifically address social media posting. These items are "I would likely post positive

comments about this company on my social media" and "I would likely post negative comments about my recruiting experience on social media" (reverse coded). Initial reliability analysis of all five items yielded $\alpha = .697$, falling below the conventional threshold of .70. Item-level diagnostics revealed that the reverse-coded social media item had a negative corrected item-total correlation ($r = -0.10$) and correlated negatively with all remaining items, suggesting it was not measuring the same construct even after reverse-coding. Removing this item improved reliability substantially ($\Delta\alpha = +.173$), and the final 4-item scale ($\alpha = .870$) was used in all subsequent

analyses. Control variables Studies have shown that perceived organizational prestige is related to organizational identification (Mael, 1988). Ma (2024) interviewed Google's CEO Sundar Pichai, who claimed that almost everyone offered a job at Google accepts, despite the recent infamous restructuring. Among the three antecedents of organizational identification (distinction, prestige, and competition; Mael & Ashforth, 1992), prestige would most likely affect organizational identification. Mael and Ashforth (1992) argue that an individual identifies with a group partly to enhance self-esteem: "The more prestigious the organization, the greater the potential boost to self-estimation through identification" (p. 107). Perceived organizational prestige was assessed using items adapted from an eight-item scale developed by Mael (1988; e.g., "People in the industry think highly of this company"; $\alpha = .88$). The response scale is a five-point scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree. The original scale was developed in a university and alumni context; four items referencing "conference schools" and one item referencing the religious community were removed as they were not applicable to the applicant reactions setting of the present study, resulting in a 5-item adapted scale (e.g., "This company is considered a top employer by people in the industry"). During reliability analysis, we realized one item, "When someone praises this company, it feels like a personal compliment," was misplaced from one of the OID items. Although this item reflects an internal psychological response to organizational praise, characteristic of organizational identification, it overlaps conceptually with perceived prestige, as both capture positive evaluations of the organization. Several empirical indicators supported its removal: it correlated only moderately with the remaining prestige items ($r = .384-.497$), considerably lower than the inter-item correlations among the other four items ($r = .645-.793$); it had the lowest corrected item-total correlation ($r = .500$) among all prestige items; and the scale reliability improved from $\alpha = .876$ to $\alpha = .898$ when it is removed ($\Delta\alpha = .022$). In addition, the 4-item solution produced better overall model fit (CFI: $.969 \rightarrow .983$; RMSEA: $.135 \rightarrow .098$) and a slightly stronger indirect effect ($\beta = .188 \rightarrow .202$, $p = .010 \rightarrow .006$), while all mediation results remained unchanged. The final 4-item scale ($\alpha = .898$) was used in all subsequent analyses. The limitations of adapting a university-based prestige scale for a corporate recruitment context are discussed further in the Limitations section; future research should consider adopting a prestige scale developed specifically for corporate or organizational settings. In addition to perceived organizational prestige, participants reported demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity) and job search experience. Specifically, they reported the number of jobs they have applied for in the past two years ($M = 6.60$, $SD = 10.11$, range = 1– 55), total work experience ($M = 8.79$, $SD = 6.47$), and when they applied for the job they referenced when completing the survey. The number of jobs applied for in the past two years, and total work experience, were controlled because the experience may change applicant reactions.

Data Analysis We used path analysis with maximum likelihood estimation in R Studio to examine the mediation (partial and main effect) relationship of organizational identification on applicants' reactions to recommendation intentions. We controlled perceived organizational prestige, years of working experience, and the number of jobs applied for in the past two years to ensure the robustness of our findings. Because a series of linear regression equations represents path analysis, it is bound by the same set of assumptions. As such, before specification, the data were checked for univariate normality, multivariate normality, and multicollinearity prior to model specification. Descriptive statistics were first evaluated to assess univariate distributional characteristics. (Table 1) The three applicants' reactions subscales: a) process fairness ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.84$), b) outcome fairness ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.79$), and c) interpersonal treatment ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.87$); organizational identification ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.95$), recommendation intentions ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.86$), and perceived organizational prestige ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.77$) all demonstrated acceptable levels of normality. Skew and kurtosis for all primary variables are checked to be below $< |3|$ and $< |10|$, respectively. However, the number of jobs applied for (skewness = $3.62 > |3|$; kurtosis = $13.88 > |10|$). As this variable served only as a control variable rather than a primary predictor, its non-normal distribution does not pose a threat to the main mediation findings. —————Insert Table 1 about here —————

Correlation coefficients between predictors are also checked for multicollinearity concerns. As shown in Table 2, the three applicant reaction subscales were moderately to strongly correlated with OID (process fairness: $r = .37$; outcome fairness: $r = .41$; interpersonal treatment: $r = .68$; all $ps < .001$) and with recommendation intentions (process fairness: $r = .57$, outcome fairness: $r = .64$; interpersonal treatment: $r = .80$; all $ps < .001$). Although these relationships are statistically significant, all correlation among the predictor variables fall well below the commonly accepted multicollinearity risk threshold of $r \geq .80$. In addition to the correlation matrix, variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.92 to 4.47, which are substantially below cutoffs for multicollinearity ($VIF \geq 10$). Taken together, these results indicate no evidence of multicollinearity, and the predictors can be interpreted reliably in the mediation models.

—————Insert Table 2 about here —————

Multivariate normality was examined using Q–Q plots and the Henze–Zirkler test. The test indicated data are not multivariate normal ($HZ = 1.55$, $p < .001$), which does not pose a concern for this study, because we will be using bootstrap estimation to test the mediation model which does not require the assumption of multivariate normality and is widely recommended when normality is violated, as it yields robust standard errors and confidence intervals (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993).

Model Fit The goodness of fit was evaluated using the following indices: the Chi-square statistic, the Root-Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), the standardized Root-Mean-Square Residual (SRMR), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI). A model is considered to have acceptable fit when the RMSEA is below 0.06, the SRMR is below .08, and the CFI and TLI are above .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The mediation model demonstrated acceptable fit, $\chi^2(3) = 5.84$, $p = .120$; CFI = .983; TLI = .928; RMSEA = .098, 90% CI [.000, .217]; SRMR = .026. Although the RMSEA (.098) exceeds the conventional threshold of .06, Kenny et al. (2015) note that this index tends to be inflated in models with small samples and few degrees of freedom, which likely accounts for the elevated value here. The wide confidence interval [.000, .217] further reflects the uncertainty in this estimate. The remaining fit indices — CFI = .983, TLI = .928, and SRMR = .026 — all met or exceeded their respective benchmarks, collectively indicating an acceptable model fit.

Hypothesis Testing

The three Hypotheses of this study were tested using path analysis in Lavaan with maximum likelihood estimation and 1,000 bootstrap samples ($N = 98$). We controlled for perceived organizational prestige (Pres), number of jobs applied for, and years of work experience. All path coefficients, standard errors, and confidence intervals are presented in Table 3. Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 1 stated that all three applicant reactions (i.e., a) process fairness, (b) outcome fairness, and (c) interpersonal treatment) would be positively related to OID. If the paths from each of the three applicant reactions are statistically significant, it

provides full support for Hypothesis 1 (H1). Hypothesis 1a was not supported; process fairness did not significantly predict OID (a-path: $\beta = -0.042$, $SE = 0.158$, $z = -0.269$, $p = .788$).

Hypothesis 1b was also not supported; outcome fairness did not significantly predict OID (a-path: $\beta = -0.204$, $SE = 0.177$, $z = -1.152$, $p = .249$). Hypothesis 1c is supported; interpersonal treatment significantly predicted organizational identification (a-path: $\beta = 0.904$, $SE = 0.105$, $p < .001$), indicating that applicants who perceived more respectful and considerate treatment during the selection process reported a strong psychological connection with the organization. The three applicant reaction dimensions collectively explained 48.0% of the variance in OID ($R^2 = .480$).

Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 2 suggested a relationship between OID and recommendation intentions. If the path from organizational identification is statistically significant, it provides full support for Hypothesis 2 (H2). Hypothesis 2 was supported. OID significantly predicts recommendation intentions (b-path: $\beta = 0.223$, $SE = 0.074$, $z = 3.011$, $p = .003$). This indicates

that applicants who reported stronger psychological identification with the organization were more likely to recommend it as a potential employer to others, even after controlling for all three applicant reaction dimensions and covariates. Hypothesis 3. Hypothesis 3 tests OID as a mediator between each of the three applicant reactions and recommendation intentions. The bootstrapped indirect effect was estimated for each applicant reaction dimension via bootstrapping with 1,000 resamples. Hypothesis 3a: Process Fairness. Process fairness was not significantly related to OID ($\beta = -0.042$, $SE = 0.158$, $p = .788$), nor did it directly predict recommendation intentions ($\beta = 0.071$, $SE = 0.114$, $z = 0.626$, $p = .532$). The indirect effect through OID was also non-significant ($\beta = -0.009$, $SE = 0.037$, $p = .797$, 95% CI $[-0.084, 0.063]$). Hypothesis 3a was not supported.

Hypothesis 3b: Outcome Fairness. Outcome fairness was not significantly related to OID ($\beta = -0.204$, $SE = 0.177$, $p = .249$), and did not directly predict recommendation intentions ($\beta = 0.176$, $SE = 0.137$, $z = 1.287$, $p = .198$). The indirect effect through OID was also non-significant ($\beta = -0.045$, $SE = 0.042$, $p = .281$, 95% CI $[-0.136, 0.027]$). Hypothesis 3b was not supported. Hypothesis 3c: Interpersonal Treatment. Interpersonal treatment strongly predicted OID ($\beta = 0.904$, $SE = 0.105$, $z = 8.600$, $p < .001$), such that applicants who felt they were treated with respect and consideration reported much stronger identification with the organization. Interpersonal treatment also directly predicted recommendation intentions ($\beta = 0.416$, $SE = 0.153$, $z = 2.722$, $p = .006$). Most importantly, the indirect effect through OID was significant ($\beta = 0.202$, $SE = 0.073$, $z = 2.758$, $p = .006$, 95% CI $[0.074, 0.355]$), indicating that part of the reason interpersonal treatment leads to higher recommendation intentions is that it first builds organizational identification. The total effect of interpersonal treatment on recommendation intentions was also significant ($\beta = 0.618$, $SE = 0.138$, $z = 4.463$, $p < .001$). With both the direct and indirect effects significant, this pattern reflects complementary partial mediation (Zhao et al., 2010) — OID accounts for approximately 33% of the total effect ($0.202 / 0.618 = 0.33$), while a meaningful direct pathway also remains. Hypothesis 3c was supported.

-----Insert Figure 1 about here-----

-----Insert Figure 2 about here-----

-----Insert Figure 3 about here-----

Ancillary Moderation Analysis As an ancillary analysis, a moderation model was tested to examine whether organizational identification (OID) moderated the relationship between applicant reactions and recommendation intentions. Three interaction terms were created by multiplying

each mean-centered applicant reaction dimension (process fairness, outcome fairness, and interpersonal treatment) with mean-centered OID. When all three interaction terms were entered simultaneously into a regression predicting recommendation intentions, controlling for perceived organizational prestige, number of jobs applied for, and years of work experience, none of the interaction terms were statistically significant: process fairness $\times$ OID ($\beta = -0.107$, $p = .231$), outcome fairness $\times$ OID ($\beta = 0.050$, $p = .667$), and interpersonal treatment $\times$ OID ($\beta = -0.060$, $p = .501$). These findings suggest that OID does not moderate the relationship between applicant reactions and recommendation intentions, and that the mediation model remains the more appropriate framework for understanding these relationships.

Discussion

This study advanced applicant reactions research by exploring the mediating role of OID on the relationship between applicants' reactions and recommendation intentions. Drawing on social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1985), organizational identification research (Herriot, 2004), and the group-value model (Lind and Tyler, 1988), the study hypothesized that fair and respectful treatment during selection would strengthen applicants' identification with the organization, and that this sense of identification would, in turn, increase their willingness to recommend the organization to others. Perceived organizational prestige, job search activity, and work experience were included as controls. As shown in the data analysis section, the results revealed that interpersonal treatment was the only applicant reaction dimension that significantly predicted OID ($\beta = 0.904$, $p < .001$), and that OID, in turn, significantly predicted recommendation intentions ($\beta = 0.223$, $p = .003$), supporting Hypotheses 1c and 2. The indirect effect of interpersonal treatment on recommendation intentions through OID was significant ($\beta = 0.202$, $p = .006$, 95% CI [0.074, 0.355]), supporting Hypothesis 3c. Interpersonal treatment also had a significant direct effect on recommendation intentions ($\beta = 0.416$, $p = .006$), indicating complementary partial mediation; OID partially mediates the effect while a direct pathway also exists. Neither process fairness nor outcome fairness significantly predicted OID or recommendation intentions in the simultaneous model, and the ancillary moderation analysis found no significant interaction between any applicant reaction dimension and OID.

Theoretical Implications These findings contribute to the applicant reactions literature in several important ways. First, this study is the first to establish OID as a mediating mechanism linking applicant reactions to recommendation intentions. While prior studies have examined OID in the context of employee behaviors and outcomes (Riketta, 2005; Dutton et al., 1994), its role as a

mediator in the applicant reactions context has not been previously tested. The significant indirect effect through OID extends prior work that has focused primarily on attitudinal outcomes such as organizational attractiveness and job acceptance intentions (Hausknecht et al., 2004), by demonstrating that applicant reactions shape a deeper psychological construct, organizational identification, that in turn drives recommendation behavior. Second, the strong and unique link between interpersonal treatment and OID is consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985) and the group value model (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1989). The group value model proposes that interpersonal treatment during social interactions gives individuals information about their standing within the group. When organizational representatives treat applicants with respect and dignity during the selection process, applicants may infer that the organization values them as potential members, fostering a sense of belonging and psychological identification even before formal employment begins. The magnitude of this effect ($\beta = 0.904$) suggests that interpersonal treatment is a particularly powerful signal through which applicants form identity-relevant judgments about the organization. This finding aligns with Gilliland and Steiner's (2012) assertion that job applicants, although outsiders, look inside the organization and make judgments about its values and identity based on how they are treated during the selection process.

Third, the nonsignificant effects of process and outcome fairness on OID are perhaps counterintuitive, as prior research in applicant reactions has consistently shown that both process and outcome fairness are important predictors of organizational perceptions and behavioral intentions (Bauer et al., 2001; Hausknecht et al., 2004). Gilliland's (1993) foundational model explicitly identified all three dimensions, process, outcome, and interpersonal treatment, as meaningful factors influencing applicant outcomes. It would seem logical that applicants perceiving the selection process as fair and the hiring decision as appropriate would feel more connected to the organization. Although both process fairness ($r = .37, p < .001$) and outcome fairness ($r = .41, p < .001$) were significantly correlated with OID at the bivariate level, their unique contributions became non-significant when all three dimensions were modeled together. This pattern indicates a suppression effect due to the high correlations among the three dimensions, especially between process fairness and interpersonal treatment ($r = .65$), and between outcome fairness and interpersonal treatment ($r = .73$). Once the shared variance with interpersonal treatment is controlled, process and outcome fairness no longer provide unique predictive power for OID. This suggests that interpersonal treatment is the main source of identity-relevant information during the selection process, while process and outcome fairness influence outcomes mainly through their association with interpersonal treatment rather than as independent identity signals. Although this might seem counterintuitive from a traditional justice perspective, it also

aligns with Tyler and Blader's (2003) group engagement model, which holds that, among the procedural justice dimensions, the quality of interpersonal treatment carries the most social identity-relevant information and thus directly influences organizational identification. Fourth, these findings support Gilliland's (1993) procedural justice framework, which differentiates among the process, outcome, and interpersonal dimensions of fairness. They also

endorse Bauer et al.'s (2001) recommendation to analyze applicant reaction dimensions separately rather than as a single combined measure. If the three dimensions had been merged into one applicant reactions score, the unique role of interpersonal treatment would have been hidden, and the detailed pattern of results would have been lost. The discovery that interpersonal treatment uniquely predicts OID, while process and outcome fairness do not, underscores the importance of viewing applicant reactions as a truly multidimensional construct.

Practical Implications From a practical standpoint, these results highlight the critical role of interpersonal treatment in shaping applicant outcomes. Organizations seeking to enhance their employer brand and generate positive word-of-mouth should invest in training recruiters and hiring managers to treat all applicants, including those who are ultimately rejected, with respect, transparency, and empathy. Gilliland et al. (2001) demonstrated that the quality of rejection letters, specifically whether they provided meaningful explanations for the hiring decision, significantly affected applicants' fairness perceptions, recommendation intentions, and reapplication behavior. Other research has also consistently shown that recruiter warmth, respect, and personableness are among the most influential determinants of applicant reactions (Hausknecht et al., 2004; Liden & Parsons, 1986). This suggests that interpersonal consideration should be embedded throughout the entire selection communication process, not only during interviews. Walker et al. (2013) further showed that every point of contact during the selection process, from the initial interview to the final notification, serves as an opportunity to build or damage organizational identification. This study finds that interpersonal treatment was the strongest predictor of both OID ($\beta = 0.904$) and recommendation intentions (total effect: $\beta = 0.618$), suggesting that even small

improvements in how applicants are treated can yield significant reputational benefits. The selection process itself is a branding opportunity, and organizations that treat all applicants, including rejected ones, as valued individuals stand to benefit from positive word of mouth in the broader talent market. Yet the reality is that many organizations are moving in the opposite direction. As AI-enabled tools increasingly replace human touchpoints in recruitment, the interpersonal quality of the selection experience is eroding. Research has confirmed that interpersonal treatment is perceived more negatively when AI is used in selection than when

human recruiters are used, and that AI-based screening leads to worse perceptions of interpersonal treatment among applicants (Acikgoz et al., 2020; Noble et al., 2021). Experimental evidence further shows that applicants perceive significantly lower interpersonal justice when they believe an AI system evaluated them compared to human reviewers (Köchling et al. (2022)), and that this can make applicants feel that the company does not care about them as people (Acikgoz et al., 2020). The findings of the present study show that interpersonal treatment effectively predicts organizational identification and recommendation intentions. Organizations that decrease the human element of their selection processes may be optimizing for efficiency while undermining the very experiences that build applicant advocacy and employer brand. Limitations

Several limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the findings of this study. First, although the achieved statistical power was sufficient to detect the observed effects (power = 1.00, $f^2 = 2.17$), future research should replicate these findings with larger and more diverse samples to improve the stability of parameter estimates and the generalizability of results, particularly for detecting smaller indirect effects that may exist beyond those identified in the present study. Second, the use of retrospective self-report data introduces potential recall bias, though 83.7% of participants reported at least moderate confidence in their recollections. Common method variance may also offer an alternative explanation for some significant findings (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Third, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. If conditions and resources allow, conducting longitudinal studies tracking applicants through the selection process could provide stronger evidence for the proposed causal pathways. Fourth, the perceived prestige scale used in this study was adapted from a university alumni context (Mael, 1988), and several items were modified or removed to fit the corporate recruitment setting. Although the final 4-item scale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .898$), future research should consider adopting or developing a prestige scale designed specifically for organizational recruitment contexts to improve construct validity. Finally, this study collected data from real job seekers on LinkedIn, which offers advantages over student samples as participants reflected on actual application experiences with real organizations. However, the LinkedIn recruitment method introduced significant data quality challenges. Of the 241 responses collected, only 98 (40.7%) were retained after excluding duplicate or bot responses, failed attention checks, and fraudulent entries, reflecting the vulnerability of online professional platforms to low-quality and automated responses. The retained sample, while demographically diverse, may not fully represent all applicant populations, as LinkedIn users tend to skew toward white-collar, professionally networked individuals whose selection experiences may differ from those in less professional or more competitive labor markets. Additionally, although McCarthy et al. (2017) indicate that most

reported findings show only moderate cross-cultural differences in applicant reactions, the majority of retained participants (75.5%) were U.S. citizens, which limits the generalizability of the findings across cultural contexts. Different cultural and social norms related to employment, particularly collectivism versus individualism, may affect the strength of the OID mediating role, and future studies should incorporate cultural perspectives into the model to test whether these findings differ across cultures and nations. Future Research Directions The findings of this study open several pathways for future research. First, future studies should investigate additional mediators of the link between interpersonal treatment and recommendation intentions. Although OID was confirmed as a significant mediator, the strong direct effect indicates that other mechanisms are also at work. Organizational trust is a particularly promising candidate. The group value model (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1989) proposes that people care deeply about their standing within a group, and that fair and respectful interpersonal treatment serves as a signal that they are valued and trusted members of that group. When this signal is positive, it not only fosters identification but may also build trust in the organization as a whole — trust that the organization is competent, benevolent, and acts with integrity (Celani et al., 2008; Klotz et al., 2013). In the selection context, where applicants are particularly attuned to how they are treated as an indicator of organizational values, interpersonal treatment may therefore generate trust in the organization independently of identification, providing a direct pathway to recommendation intentions. A serial mediation model testing the sequential pathways from interpersonal treatment through organizational trust to OID and ultimately recommendation intentions would offer a more comprehensive understanding of these underlying psychological processes, and would further extend the group value model into the applicant reactions context.

Second, as organizations increasingly adopt automated and AI-enabled selection tools, applicants often face greater uncertainty due to reduced human presence, limited information, and unclear decision-making protocols (Acikgoz et al., 2020; Woods et al., 2020). In these contexts, trustworthiness becomes a key factor shaping applicant reactions, complementing the classic organizational justice-based frameworks (Celani et al., 2008; Gilliland, 1993). Much of the classic literature on applicant reactions assumes that applicants can evaluate fairness by observing human decision-makers and receiving meaningful explanations (Gilliland, 1993; Bauer et al., 2001). However, AI-based systems often obscure how decisions are made, making it harder for applicants to rely on familiar fairness cues (Köchling & Wehner, 2022; Lukacik et al., 2022). As a result, applicants may feel anxious about whether the system and the organization that uses it are competent, well-intentioned, and responsible (Celani et al., 2008; Klotz et al., 2013). In these contexts, organizational trustworthiness may become an even more critical mediating mechanism than OID, as applicants may rely more heavily on trust perceptions to form their recommendation

intentions (Celani et al., 2008; Klotz et al., 2013). Future studies should therefore test whether the mediating role of OID weakens in AI-driven selection contexts, and whether organizational trust emerges as a stronger explanatory mechanism in the absence of meaningful interpersonal interaction. Third, future research should explore the role of hiring outcomes as a moderator. The current study included both accepted and rejected applicants but did not explicitly test whether the mediated pathway through OID varies by hiring decision. It is plausible that rejected applicants who are treated well interpersonally may still develop OID and recommend the organization, while those treated poorly are unlikely to do so, regardless of the outcome. Testing this boundary

condition would have important practical implications for how organizations manage candidate rejection communication. Fourth, a cross-cultural comparison would strengthen the generalizability of these findings. Given that interpersonal treatment and organizational identification may be experienced differently across cultural contexts, particularly in collectivist versus individualist societies (Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004), future studies should collect data across multiple countries to test whether the mediating role of OID differentiates across cultures. Japan, in particular, represents a promising context for future investigation. As one of the most collectivist and longterm oriented cultures in the world (Hofstede, 1980), Japanese applicants may place even greater emphasis on group belonging and organizational harmony during the selection process, potentially strengthening the role of OID as a mediating mechanism. Furthermore, Japan's cultural emphasis on long-term relationships and organizational loyalty suggests that interpersonal treatment during selection may carry particularly strong identity-relevant signals, making the pathways identified in this study potentially more salient in Japanese organizational contexts. Examining whether these findings replicate and intensify in Japan would provide important boundary conditions for the theoretical model proposed in this study."

Conclusions

This study explored how applicants' reactions to the selection process relate to their recommendation intentions, with a focus on the mediating role of organizational identification. The results show that interpersonal treatment is the main applicant reaction that influences OID and, in turn, recommendation behavior. When applicants feel they are treated with respect, dignity, and consideration during the selection process, they develop a stronger psychological

connection with the organization, which encourages them to endorse it as an employer even before they become members. These findings extend research on applicant reactions by

introducing OID as a viable mediating mechanism and identifying interpersonal treatment as the specific dimension that activates it. However, process fairness and outcome fairness, long assumed to be central drivers of applicant outcomes, did not uniquely predict OID once interpersonal treatment was accounted for, underscoring the primacy of the relational dimension of the selection experience. These findings also reinforce the practical importance of viewing the selection process not merely as an evaluation tool but as an early and critical opportunity to build organizational identification and long-term reputational outcomes. In the AI era, where organizations are increasingly automating recruitment, the present study serves as a reminder that how applicants are treated as human beings, not just as candidates to be screened, remains the most powerful driver of organizational identification and employer advocacy.

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Appendix A Applicants' Reactions: Gilliland et al., 2001 All assessed with 5-point scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree
Process Fairness: Whether or not I got the job, I feel the selection process was fair. The methods this company used to screened applicants was appropriate. This company made hiring decisions in a way that was fair to job applicants. Overall, I feel the hiring process was consistent and unbiased.
Outcome Fairness: Overall, I feel the results of the selection process were unfair. Given the situation, I feel the company made the right hiring decision. Overall, I believe the hiring decision was appropriate. I feel the company's decision about whether or not to hire me was fair.
Interpersonal Treatment: I feel that this company was concerned about my fair treatment. This company was very fair in considering my needs and well-being. This company was concerned about the way they

treated applicants. I was treated with a high degree of respect and sincerity. Appendix B Recommendation Intentions: Gilliland et al., 2001 All assessed with 5-point scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree Recommendations: If I hear about other jobs with this company, I would be interested in applying for them. I would recommend this company to my friends. I think my friends would be interested in applying for a job at this company. I would likely post positive comments about this company on my social media. I would likely post negative comments about my recruiting experience on social media. (R) Appendix C Organizational identification Mael and Ashforth (1992) The terms student, alumni, instructor, school, and conference can be replaced with employee, employees, manager, organization, and industry. Organizational identification [1 = Strongly agree; 5 = Strongly disagree] 1 When someone criticizes (name of company), it feels like a personal insult. 2 I am very interested in what others think about (name of company). 3 When I talk about this company, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'. 4 This company's successes are my successes. 5 When someone praises this company, it feels like a personal compliment. 6 If a story in the media criticized the company, I would feel embarrassed. Appendix D Perceived organizational prestige Mael and Ashforth (1992) [1 = Strongly agree; 5 = Strongly disagree] Perceived organizational prestige 1 People in my community think highly of (name of school). 2 It is considered prestigious in the religious community to be an alumnus of (name of school). 3 (Name of school) is considered one of the best (conference schools). 4 People from other (conference schools) look down at (name of school). (R) 5 Alumni of all (conference schools) would be proud to have their children attend (name of school). 6 (Name of school) does not have a good reputation in my community. (R) 7 A person seeking to advance his career in (conference academia) should downplay his association with (name of school). (R) 8 When other (conference schools) are recruiting new students, they would not want students from (name of school). (R) Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 98) Variable 1. Process Fairness 2. Outcome Fairness 3. Interpersonal Treatment 4. Organizational Identification 5. Recommendation Intentions 6. Perceived Prestige 98 6.60 10.11 0.00 55.00 8. Work Experience (years) Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; Min = minimum; Max = maximum. All scale variables used a 5-point response format (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Jobs Applied and Work Experience are reported in raw units (count and years, respectively). Table 2 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 98) Variable 1. Process Fairness 2. Outcome Fairness 3. Interpersonal Treatment 4. Organizational Identification 5. Recommendation Intentions 6. Perceived Prestige -0.32** -0.34*** -0.26* 8. Work Experience Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation. Values in correlation columns are Pearson's r. Correlations are presented without leading zeros per APA convention. * p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

Table 3 Path Coefficients and Indirect Effects for the Mediation Model (N = 98) Parameter a-

paths (Applicant Reactions → OID) Process Fairness → OID Outcome Fairness → OID

Interpersonal Treatment → OID Model R² b-path (OID → Recommendation Intentions) OID

→ Recommendation Intentions -0.042 -0.204 0.904 0.158 0.177 0.105 -0.269 -1.152

8.600 Outcome Fairness → OID → Recommendation Intentions Interpersonal Treatment →

OID → Recommendation Intentions Covariates (→ Recommendation Intentions) Perceived

Organizational Prestige Number of Jobs Applied For Years of Work Experience Model R²

0.116 0.007 0.000 0.081 0.009 0.008 1.426 0.789 0.016 c'-paths (Direct Effects →

Recommendation Intentions) Process Fairness → Recommendation Intentions Outcome

Fairness → Recommendation Intentions Interpersonal Treatment → Recommendation

Intentions Indirect Effects (OID as Mediator) Process Fairness → OID → Recommendation

Intentions Note. β = standardized path coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = bootstrap 95%

confidence interval. Bootstrap resamples = 1,000. CI is reported only for indirect effects.

OID = organizational identification. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. Figure 1 Mediation

Model for Process Fairness, Organizational Identification, and Recommendation Intentions

Note: controlling for prestige, number of jobs applied in the last two years, and number of

years of working experience. The dotted line represents nonsignificant relations; the solid

line represents significant relations ** $p < .01$, Figure 2 Mediation Model for Outcome

Fairness, Organizational Identification, and Recommendation Intentions Note: controlling for

prestige, number of jobs applied in the last two years, and number of years of working

experience. The dotted line represents nonsignificant relations; the solid line represents

significant relations ** $p < .01$, Figure 3 Mediation Model for Interpersonal Treatment,

Organizational Identification, and Recommendation Intentions Note: controlling for prestige,

number of jobs applied in the last two years, and number of years of working experience.

The dotted line represents nonsignificant relations; the solid line represents significant

relations ** $p < .01$,