Effects of Pay Transparency on Application Intentions Through Justice Perceptions and Organizational Attractiveness

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We investigated how applicants infer treatment of employees based on an organization's pay transparency policy (PTP). We tested a serial mediation model in which PT influences applicants' intentions to apply to a job through increased fairness perceptions and organizational attractiveness. Participants were randomly assigned to read a company's profile that implements PT or pay secrecy. Participants indicated: (a) the extent the company treats its employees fairly, (b) their attraction to the company, and (c) their intent to apply. Results suggest that a PTP signal company values of equity and justice to applicants. We conclude with strategies for attracting applicants.

Keywords: pay transparency, justice, fairness, organizational attraction, intentions to apply, equity

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the topic of the pay gap and financial inequity has resurfaced in the wake of the MeToo and Women's March (Weaver & Rich, 2018). An often-cited statistic is that the gender wage gap results in the average woman losing $530,000 throughout her lifetime, and if she is college-educated, she loses nearly $800,000 (IWPR, 2016). The Equal Pay Act (EPA) of 1963 followed by the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay (LLFP) Act passed in 2009 prohibits "sex-based discrimination between men and women in the same establishment who perform jobs that require substantially equal skill, effort, and responsibility under similar working conditions" (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). However, loopholes and court rulings that permit men to be paid more based on seniority, work level, marital status, and the number of children have rendered the LLFP Act insufficient to address the gravity of the issue (Brinlee, 2016; Douglas, 2009; Vagins & Usova, 2011). For instance, individuals who are single or childless have the option to work longer and more flexible hours. The Paycheck Fairness Act (PFA) proposed in 1997 would add more protections to the EPA, such as protecting employees from employer retaliation if they share their wages (Nilsen, 2019; H.R.7- Paycheck Fairness Act). The PFA has been reintroduced to Congress many times, and it was approved by the House of Representatives, only to fail in Senate.

Consequently, anecdotes involving an employee overhearing their peers' pay and realizing how underpaid they are have become commonplace (Knight, 2016; Markman, 2014). The popular rise of back-channel tools, such as Glassdoor, PayScale, and Levels.fyi allow employees to share their pay rates anonymously to gauge their standing amongst their peers (Kolaski & Taylor, 2019; Malacoff, 2018; Marasi & Bennet, 2016; Smit & Montag-Smit, 2019). If they do not perceive an unfair discrepancy, employees can continue in their current position. However, if they feel they are unfairly underpaid, the employee may search for a position elsewhere or approach their supervisors about a pay raise.

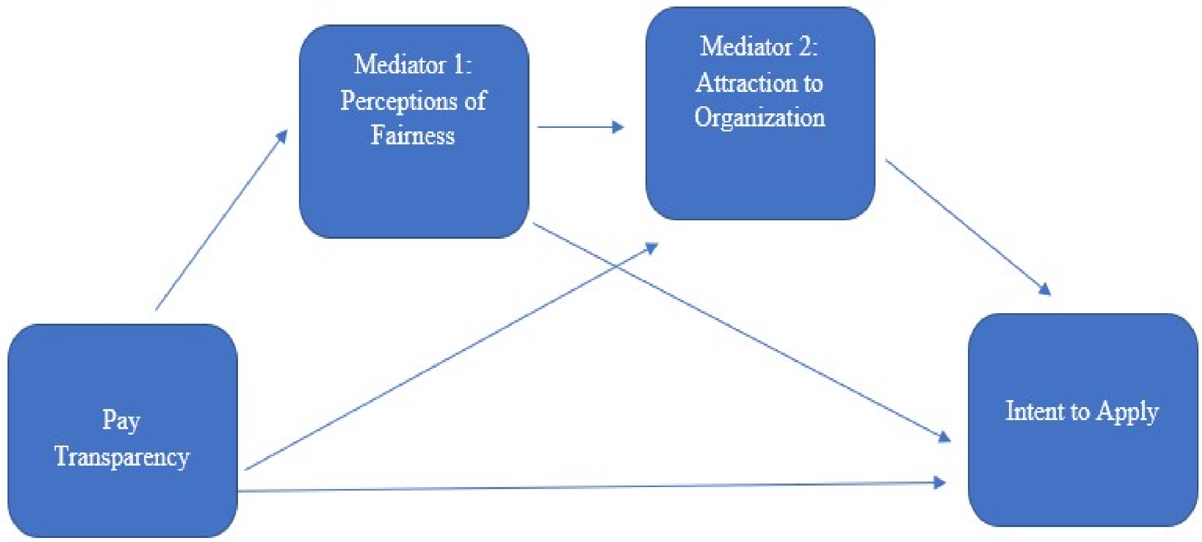
Issues of pay disparities that disadvantage women and minorities in the last several years have led to renewed interest in pay transparency policies (Baker, Halberstam, Kroft, Mas, Messacar, 2019; Colella, Paetzold, Zardkoohi & Wesson; Connell & Mantoan, 2007). Incidentally, Kim (2015) outlines a compelling argument that pay secrecy is one of the reasons why the gender pay gap persists. Castilla (2008; 2015) tested this notion and found that organizational accountability and pay transparency were positively associated with pay gap reduction, presumably in part because transparency sheds light on racial and gender biases, so they can be addressed and corrected.

In the current investigation, we tested the proposition that pay transparency and applicants' intent to pursue and to apply for a job would be mediated by applicant perceptions of the extent to which the organization treats its employees fairly. We believe that this study represents an essential first step in establishing the effects of pay transparency on attracting applicants whose values are congruent with the organization's mission and priorities. When preliminary evidence is established for the causal connections between pay transparency and applicant attitudes, the foundation will be laid for future work identifying moderators of these relationships. For instance, does an organization that has a pay transparency policy attract a different type of applicant than an organization adheres to pay secrecy? We believe that answering these questions is critical for organizations that value equity and are attempting to recruit and retain diverse workforces. Thus, in the study, we test, via an experimental design, the causal link between pay transparency and applicant perceptions that the organization values the fair treatment of its employees. In turn, we believe that applicants who perceive that they will be fairly treated as employees will experience enhanced attraction to the organization and be more likely to apply for employment there (Highhouse, Lievens, & Sinar, 2003).

Pay Transparency: Benefits and Drawbacks

Hartmann and Slapniĉar (2012) define pay transparency as "the extent to which employees are familiar with each other's pay levels" (p. 4284). In the United States, pay secrecy is generally the norm (Day, 2006) for a couple of primary reasons. First, employers are concerned that when employees are disgruntled about pay, they are more likely to unionize (Bierman and Gely, 2004). Also, some employees wish to keep their salaries private (Colella et al., 2007; Cullen & Perez-Truglia, 2018). However, transparency has some positive aspects, also. When an organization implements pay transparency policies, either voluntarily or in response to a legal mandate (e.g., Executive Order 13665), it is opening itself to criticism and accountability. Thus, the organization can anticipate inquiries and ultimately cultivate employee trust by employing a process of developing the pay structure that can be explained and justified to employees (Friedman, 2014). Moreover, gender or racial pay gaps are more easily detected under conditions of transparency (Trotter, Zacur, & Stickney, 2017). Finally, pay secrecy has been associated with diminished job performance (Bamberger & Belogolovsky 2010; Gely & Bierman, 2003) and decreased intrinsic motivation (Colella et al., 2007), ostensibly because it masks the pay-performance link. Presently, there is limited empirical work on the effects of pay transparency policies on attracting applicants in the recruitment process. Specifically, openly advertising pay transparency policies may be one way to shape potential applicants' impressions of the organization's brand, values, and priorities and influence their desire to pursue employment there (Eger, Mičík, Gangur, & Řehoř, 2019; Sharma & Prasad, 2018). Therefore, in this study, we manipulated whether an organization makes its salaries transparent to its employees to observe its causal effects on attitudes of potential applicants. For the full, proposed model, see Figure 1.

FIGURE 1
PROPOSED MODEL



Pay Transparency and Commitment to Fairness

Organizations are currently competing for the best talent (Bohlmann, Krumbohlz, & Zacher, 2017; Roberson, Collins, & Oreg, 2005; Tarique & Schuler, 2010). A strategy for addressing the challenge of attracting qualified applicants is sharing information in recruiting materials that give job seekers an idea of what to expect if they were to join the organization. According to signaling theory (Spence, 1973; Rynes, 1989), job seekers use cues in the recruitment and selection processes (e.g., recruiter behaviors, communication timelines) to make attributions about the norms and values of an organization and render judgments as to whether they will make a good fit as an employee. Moreover, fairness heuristic theory (Lind, Kray, & Thompson, 2001; Van den Bos, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1997) predicts that when individuals are deciding whether to personally invest in a group or institution, they seek clues regarding the extent to which that group prioritizes fair treatment of its members. In the recruiting context, potential applicants then use this information to decide whether they will apply for a position or accept an offer (Celani and Singh, 2010; Collins & Stevens, 2002). In the absence of complete information about a given company or position, job seekers attempt to reduce uncertainty by looking for cues that appear on the company's website, in the job description, or on third-party sites like Glassdoor. Some company attributes that have been associated with favorable applicant impressions include: (a) corporate social responsibility (Catano & Hines, 2016; Frick, 2018; Lis, 2018), (b) diversity commitments (Luce, Barber, & Hillman, 2001), and (c) fair selection procedures (Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014; Joo, Hyoung, & Choi, 2016). Similarly, we believe that holding constant all other company characteristics, its pay transparency policy can communicate an important message to potential employees about its values and commitment to equity. Specifically, when salaries for all positions are openly shared, the implicit message is that the organization has been intentional in thinking through issues of pay equity and is equipped to defend the pay structure if/when inquiries arise. Conversely, if there is pay secrecy, there is no way of knowing if the organization has thought through issues of pay equity and if it can defend its pay structure against legitimate criticism. Consistent with this rationale, Day (2011) and Smit and Montag-Smit (2018) found a positive association between pay transparency and employee perceptions of procedural justice. Therefore, we aimed to build on this prior work and extend it to the recruiting context by proposing that:

Hypothesis 1. *Organizations with pay transparency will be judged to be fairer in their treatment of employees than organizations with pay secrecy.*

Pay Transparency Influences Applicant Attraction Through Fairness Perceptions

For several decades, research on the topic of organizational justice has yielded findings that are consistent with the notion that individuals generally hold favorable attitudes toward organizations that prioritize fair treatment of their members (Jones et al., 2014; Joo et al., 2016). Moreover, an individual's evaluations regarding whether an organization demonstrated fair treatment in its decision-making procedures (i.e., procedural justice) often predicts relevant employee behaviors such as organizational citizenship behaviors or withdrawal (Blader, 2009; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). Hence, we propose that when applicants believe that the organization treats its employees fairly, they will hold that organization in higher regard.

Organizational attraction is conceptualized as a positive affective attitude towards a company that motivates applicants to move towards further engagement with it (Turban and Keon, 1993). Berthon et al. (2015) elaborated on this concept of 'employer attractiveness' by indicating it may be evident through the organization's capacity to display attributes that are desirable to potential applicants. A meta-analysis conducted by Chapman and colleagues (2005) suggests that a positive organizational image or brand is a reliable indicator of applicant attraction to the company and job pursuit intentions. The instrumental-symbolic framework proposes that applicant attraction to an organization is, in part, a function of instrumental and symbolic attributes that are obtained from the organization's image or brand (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Instrumental attributes can refer to concrete, factual information about a job or organization, such as pay, benefits, hours, etc. (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Slaughter & Greguras, 2009; Slaughter, Zickar, Highhouse, & Mohr, 2004). Symbolic attributes can be defined as subjective, abstract, and intangible characteristics that convey information about the organization in the form of imagery or trait inferences that the applicants assign to the organization (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens, Hoye, & Anseel 2007; Slaughter et al., 2004). For example, when applicants feel that selection procedures are fair, they are more likely to believe that the organization is committed to just and impartial treatment of its employees (i.e., symbolic attributes; Konradt et al., 2017; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Walker et al., 2013). Therefore, we believe that pay transparency may serve as both an instrumental attribute (e.g., concrete information regarding pay) and a symbolic attribute (e.g., conveying perceptions of procedural justice onto the organization). In turn, this may result in applicants having a positive impression of the organization (Ployhart, Ryan, & Bennett, 1999), being attracted to the organization (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005) and applying for a position in the company (Ployhart & Ryan, 1998). Thus, we believe that pay transparency, mediated by applicant perceptions of the extent to which employees are treated justly, will invoke a positive affective sentiment towards the organization. Based on this framework, we propose that:

Hypothesis 2. *Pay transparency will positively influence attraction to the organization through heightened perceptions of fairness.*

In addition to organizational attraction, a potential applicant's intent to apply for a position in the company indicates further commitment, such as taking concrete action (Highhouse et al., 2003). Intent to apply is a behavior-based decision in which the applicant actively pursues an opportunity to join the organization (Sharma & Prasad, 2018). Our intent was to explain the proposed positive link between an organization's pay transparency policy and applicants' intent to apply to a position in that organization through not only fairness perceptions but also through applicant attraction to the organization. The positive link between applicant attraction and intent to apply has been established in prior empirical findings (Acarlar & Bilgic, 2013; Roberson et al., 2005; Sharma & Prasad, 2018). Consequently, we propose the following causal sequence:

Hypothesis 3(a & b). *Pay transparency will positively influence potential applicants' intent to apply through increased: (a) perceptions of fairness and (b) organization attractiveness.*

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

There were two inclusion criteria for participants: 18+ years of age and be of United States nationality. Participants were employed in a wide array of industries, and 57% indicated they were female. Please see Table 1 for a breakdown of ethnicities and industries represented in the sample.

TABLE 1
FREQUENCIES OF TOP INDUSTRIES & WORK EXPERIENCE & ETHNICITIES REPRESENTED IN THE SAMPLE

Demographic	*N*	Percent
Industry		
Not Working	21	17.9
Medical/Dental/Healthcare	13	11.1
Education	11	9.4
Wholesale/Retail/Distribution	8	6.8
Other	33	28.2
Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	93	79.5
Multi-Racial	7	6.0
Black/African American	5	4.3
Hispanic/Latinx	5	4.3
Asian	5	4.3
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0.9
Prefer not to say	1	0.9

Note. N = 117.

The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete, and participants were compensated $1.67, based on a $10 hourly wage. Participants were solicited through Prolific.com, an online crowdsourcing platform commonly used for research and data collection (Palan & Schitter, 2018; Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, Acquisti, 2017). Platforms such as Prolific and MTurk permit researchers to post experiments online, so they can be completed by any participants who meet the minimum requirements (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). Participants were asked to imagine themselves in the role of a job seeker with this prompt:

> *Imagine that you are looking for a job and discover that Company X is hiring. Company X is a leader in the industry, and its work aligns with your skills and interests. You use the website Glassdoor to read reviews from Company X's current and former employees. The following is a description of Company X that summarizes the main points found on Glassdoor. Please read the description carefully, and afterward, there will be some questions about your feelings about working for this company.*

Participants were then randomly assigned to read one of the two following scenarios:

Pay Transparency Condition

> *Company X is adopting pay transparency, which allows employees and the public to easily access salaries for every job title. Pay gaps among people with the same job title will no longer exist. Management hopes that this new pay policy will remove worry and gossip among employees about how much money their coworkers are making. They also believe that because employees can access the salaries of upper management, they can use that information as motivation to move up in the company. Thus, the criteria for promotion to the next job level clearly are made. For these reasons, Company X's management does not mind employees discussing their salaries with one another. During the hiring process, there are no salary negotiations because employees are brought in at the salary that is associated with their job title. Also, they can expect a standard, yearly salary increases to keep up with rising cost-of-living.*

Pay Secrecy Condition

> *Company X offers no pay transparency. Each employee's salary is treated as private information—known only to the employee, the employee's direct supervisor, and the HR department. Employees are told that their salaries are determined by their yearly performance reviews, but the decision methods that Company X uses to set pay levels are not disclosed. Thus, the criteria for promotion to the next job level are unclear. Management hopes this pay policy will protect their flexibility in setting pay levels for each employee, and they also wish to respect employee privacy. During hiring processes, Company X will extend a salary offer based on an applicant's skills and experience. Then the applicant may exercise the option to negotiate and maybe obtain a higher starting salary.*

Finally, they responded to questions about their expectations that employees in Company X were fairly treated along with their feelings about working for Company X.

Measures

Manipulation of Pay Transparency

One hundred twenty participants were randomly assigned to one of two descriptions of Company X. The first condition described the company as implementing a policy of pay transparency [$n = 60$] and the other condition featured a policy of pay secrecy [$n = 60$]. The descriptions were written to reflect realistic pay policies used in contemporary organizations. Moreover, our objective was to convey that Company X was intentional in thinking through this policy and was open to providing a rationale for why it was promoting transparency or secrecy. Thus, for each scenario, the goal was to integrate plausible explanations for the company's pay transparency policies that would paint the company in a similarly positive light across both conditions. 'Company X' was chosen to be a neutral name that would not invoke participants' preconceptions about a real company.

After reading the company description, participants responded to a statement that read, "Company X openly shares each employee's salary" on a 7-point Likert scale 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). To ensure that participants comprehended and interpreted the manipulation as intended, we ran a t-test to determine if the conditions differed in their response to the manipulation check question. Because the Levene's Test was significant ($F[1, 118] = 24.08$, $p < .001$), we ran a Welch's t because it is robust to violations of the homogeneity assumption (Field, Miles, & Field, 2012; Zimmerman, 2004). Results indicated a significant difference between the two conditions in the direction expected ($t\,[107.37] = 622.13$, $p < .001$). A closer inspection of the data revealed that two participants in the transparency condition and one in the secrecy condition failed to pass the manipulation check question; therefore, they were eliminated from further analyses. This left a final sample of 117 — $n = 58$ in the transparency condition and $n = 59$ in the secrecy condition.

Perceptions of Fairness

From Blader & Tyler's (2009) Procedural Justice Scale (PJS), we selected 3 items that were most appropriate for the recruiting/job applicant context. The PJS was adapted from Colquitt et al. (2001) 's original measure. Participants responded to each item while imagining themselves as job seekers considering Company X as a potential employer. For each item, participants are asked to rate the statements on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The items were aggregated by calculating the mean, and higher scores indicated greater perceptions of justice. An example item is "I would expect that employee-related issues and decisions that arise at Company X would be handled fairly." In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was .93.

Organization Attraction

The measure we used in this study represented a combination of the organization attraction scales (OAS; Highhouse et al., 2003) and the organizational attractiveness subscale (Cropanzano, Slaugther, & Bachiochi, 2005). The OAS (Highhouse et al., 2003) is a 15-item questionnaire with 3 subscales: (a) general attractiveness, (b) intentions to pursue, and (c) prestige. For the purpose of our study, we used the 4-item general attractive subscale. An example includes, "A job at this company is very appealing to me."

The application intentions scale (AIS) developed by Cropanzano et al. (2005) had six subscales: (a) distributive justice, (b) procedural justice, (c) interactional justice, (d) outcome unfavorability, (e) application intentions, and (f) organizational attractiveness. From Cropanzano et al.'s (2005) organizational attractiveness subscale, we used 3 items. An example item asserts: "I would think very highly of Company X for implementing this pay policy." Participants ranked each statement on a 7-point Likert scale as well, ranging from 1(*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). In keeping with the study's context, we created composites from the two subscales (4 items from Highhouse et al. and 3 items from Cropanzano) to represent our variable. Items were aggregated by calculating the mean, and higher scores indicated greater attraction to the organization. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .94.

Intentions to Apply

To gauge survey respondents' intentions to pursue Company X as a job applicant, we also adopted both Highhouse (2003) and Cropanzano's (2005) subscales. The OAS's second subscale, intentions to pursue, consisted of 5 questions. For each of these items, participants are asked to rate the statements on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). An example item states: "I would make Company X one of my first choices as an employer."). For the purposes of the current study, we chose to use the application intentions subscale, which is consists of 3 items. Participants rated the statements on a 11-point slide scale, ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 10 (*strongly agree*). An example item states, "I would send an application to Company X." Items were aggregated by calculating the mean, and higher scores indicated greater intentions to apply. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .90.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptives and bivariate correlations for all study variables are displayed in Table 2. Interestingly, the patterns of bivariate correlations are consistent with the hypotheses. Pay transparency had a significant impact on fairness ($r = .62$, $p < .01$). Likewise, pay transparency positively influenced organizational attraction ($r = .67$, $p < .01$) and intent to apply ($r = .52$, $p < .01$).

TABLE 2
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND CORRELATIONS

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1. Pay transparency	0.50	0.50				
2. Fairness	4.01	1.63	0.62	(0.93)		
3. Organizational attraction	4.17	1.11	0.67	0.83	(0.88)	
4. Intent to apply	6.57	2.64	0.52	0.64	0.75	(0.90)
5. Gender	0.58	0.50	0.03	0.11	0.08	0 .11

Note. N = 117. Pay transparency condition coded 0 = secrecy; 1 = transparency. Gender coded 0 = male and 1 = female. Correlations < |0.5| are significant at p < .01, non-directional. Cronbach's alphas are on the diagonal.

Primary Analyses

For Hypothesis 1, we predicted that organizations with pay transparency would be judged as more likely to treat their employees fairly than organizations with pay secrecy. This proposition was tested with an independent t-test, and it was significant (t[107.82] = 8.38, p < .001; d = 1.37).

In Hypothesis 2, we proposed that pay transparency would positively influence attraction to the organization through heightened applicant perceptions of fairness. To test this mediation, we used SPSS macro PROCESS (Hayes, 2013, Model 4. Results were consistent with the proposed mediation with a positive, significant indirect effect (B_{a*b} = .91; BC 95% CI = 0.64 to 1.22). Full results of this test are displayed in Table 3.

TABLE 3
REGRESSION RESULTS FOR MEDIATION:
PAY TRANSPARENCY → PROCEDURAL JUSTICE → ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRACTION

	Mediator Model (DV = Fairness)			
Predictor	B	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Constant	3.02	0.17	17.94	0.00
Pay Transparency	2.00	0.23	08.36	0.00
	Outcome Model (DV = Organizational Attraction)			
Predictor	B	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Constant	2.07	0.15	13.99	0.00
Pay Transparency	0.58	0.14	4.27	0.00
Fairness	0.45	0.04	10.80	0.00
	Boot Indirect Effect	Boot SE	Bias Corrected 95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
Indirect Effect	0.91	0.15	0.64	1.22

Note. *N = 117*. *SE* = standard error. *CI* = confidence interval. Pay Transparency condition coded 0 = No Pay Transparency, 1 = Pay Transparency.

For Hypothesis 3, we predicted that pay transparency would positively influence intent to apply to the organization through increased perceptions of fairness and organization attractiveness. We used SPSS macro PROCESS (Hayes, 2013: Model 6). Results of the serial mediation demonstrated a significant indirect effect of pay transparency on intentions to apply by way of fairness and organizational attraction $B_{total\ indirect\ effect}$ = 1.41; BC 95% CI = 0.71 to 2.16 (see Table 4).

TABLE 4
PATH COEFFICIENTS AND INDIRECT EFFECTS FOR MEDIATION MODELS

	Path Coefficients (B)			Indirect Effects		
Predictor	to Fairness	to Organizational Attraction	to Intent to Apply	Estimate (B)	SE_{Boot}	Bias-Corrected Bootstrap 95% CI
Constant	3.02	2.07	0.86			
Pay Transparency	2.00	0.58	-0.05			
Fairness		0.45	0.33			
Organizational Attraction			0.74			
Total				1.76	0.29	1.18, 2.33
PT → F → IA				0.66	0.35	0.07, 1.44
PT → OA → IA				0.43	0.17	0.09, 0.77
PT → F → OA →IA				0.67	0.28	0.14, 1.26

Note. *N* = 117. *SE* = standard error. *CI* = confidence interval. Pay Transparency Coded 0 = No Pay Transparency, 1 = Pay Transparency. PT = Pay transparency, F = Fairness, IA = Intent to Apply, OA = Organizational Attraction.

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

Overall, the results suggest support for our predictions and are consistent with Scheller and Harrison's (2018) findings that pay transparency, and justice perceptions predict positive outcomes, such as employee pay satisfaction and affective commitment. Our study extends these findings to the recruiting context where applicants are making attributions about a company's priorities as they make decisions about positions to which they will apply. In accordance with Scheller and Harrison's (2018) results, the current findings highlight the potential benefits of companies clearly highlighting their pay transparency policies in their recruiting materials, branding, and distribution of information. Interestingly, the preference for pay transparency over secrecy accounted for 38%, 45%, and 27% of the variability in fairness perceptions, attraction to the organization, and intent to apply, respectively. Given that pay transparency has been a controversial policy among U.S. employees (Le Beau, 2019; Zenger, 2016), these rather large effects were somewhat surprising.

Practical Implications

The results of our study inform organizations on how to implement pay transparency in two ways. First, job applicants in our sample prefer companies that promote pay transparency. As such, we recommend organizations to utilize recruiting materials to broadcast that they are a fair organization to attract new employees. Employees who value equity and equality are attracted to employers who act in accordance with their values (Belogolovsky & Bamberger, 2014; Eger et al., 2019). Additionally, employees are already surreptitiously sharing their salaries with each other, as evidenced by sites such as Glassdoor, PayScale, and Levels.fyi. Szypko (2014) reported that approximately 40% of IBM employees are unhappy with their pay under existing pay secrecy policies. Promoting a transparent pay policy may even attract a younger, diverse pool of applicants (Trotter et al., 2017; Elsesser, 2018).

Second, if companies hope to implement a pay transparency policy, it may benefit them to do so responsibly to motivate and retain newly recruited employees, or it may prevent a barrage of employees demanding higher pay (one study revealed that ninety-two percent of engineers of two large companies felt they were in the top quarter of performers; Zenger, 2016). In the pay transparency literature, best practices for transitioning from pay secrecy to transparency in a responsible way that minimizes harm while maximizing benefits are provided (Zardkoohi, & Wesson, 2007; Hartmann & Slapnicar, 2012; Smit & Montag-Smit, 2019). A part of gaining employees' satisfaction for these policies is derived from setting up a performance management system in which the pay-performance link is strengthened (Lawler & Jenkins, 1992; Aguinis, 2013; Trotter et al., 2017). Belogolovsky and Bamberger (2014) demonstrated that pay transparency policies combined with employee comprehension of compensation systems increase individual task performance and continuation intentions. Moreover, in the development of a transparency policy, organizations should also aim to be fair (Castilla, 2015). A few considerations to implement a fair, transparent policy are: (a) helping employees understand the existing pay policy, (b) implementing the continuum of pay transparency accurately, (c) realizing the alignment between company goals and pay transparency, (d) inviting employees to participate in the development of these policies, and gradually rolling out the changes (Trotter et al., 2017; Burke, 2018s; Elsesser, 2018; Upfront; 2018; Anderson, 2019). Employing these steps can increase the likelihood that organizations will recruit desirable applicants by signaling that the company's actions are congruent with its stated values (Belogolovsky & Bamberger, 2014; Eger et al., 2019) and hopefully retain them once hired (Hartman & Slapnicar, 2012). We would be remiss to neglect to mention that despite the best efforts for implementing pay transparency, some employees may inevitably leave because their values are not aligned with equity and pay transparency. This issue is addressed further below.

Limitations and Future Directions

The findings demonstrated that pay transparency results in favorable attitudes toward the organization. However, it is still unknown whether there are any systematic differences between the people who would prefer to work for organizations with pay transparency versus those who would prefer secrecy. It could be that those who benefit from the pay gap and inequity will be less amenable to pay transparency policies. For instance, Bamberger and Belogolovsky (2010) found that those with a high tolerance for inequity had greater job performance under conditions of pay secrecy than those with a lower tolerance for inequity. These individuals typically benefit from pay secrecy by earning higher wages than their colleagues (Trotter et al., 2017). Moreover, those who are highly confident in their salary negotiating skills may prefer secrecy, as it provides cover for highly discrepant pay levels between people doing similar jobs. Conversely, those who do not benefit from negotiation, such as women who are often penalized for advocating for themselves (Williams & Tiedens, 2016), may prefer more transparency.

Umphress et al. (2007) discovered that social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) explains how prospective employees' statuses and the employer's status composition impact perceived organizational attractiveness. For example, high-status job applicants are attracted to high-status organizations comprised of high-status employees. Under pay secrecy, these employees could more easily negotiate a disproportionately higher salary while still maintaining a positive reputation among their peers. By implementing a pay transparency policy, high-status job applicants are potentially deterred from applying, and high-status current employees may decide to leave. However, this concern may become less relevant in the future because there is emerging evidence that the upcoming generation of employees tends to mistrust the type of authority that salary secrecy represents (Trotter et al., 2017). Moreover, organizations can decide if it is worthwhile to retain employees who are misaligned with the company's goals of transparency and equity. In future work, researchers should continue building and testing a theoretical model for understanding which types of applicants would be drawn to an organization based on its pay transparency policy. For example, organizations that value corporate social responsibility and openly advertise their pay transparency policies may attract applicants who would experience enhanced perceptions of person-organization fit once hired. Also, it would be interesting to examine the role of pay transparency in building trust across management, human resources, and employees, particularly when it is combined with a strong performance management system.

In addition to uncovering the potential benefits of transparency, it is also essential to identify the potential pitfalls of implementing a transparent pay structure. For sociocultural contexts where individualism and competition are valued, such as the United States, where this study was conducted, there are still strong pay secrecy norms—particularly in the private sector (Smit & Montag-Smit, 2018). Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that there is wide variability in how U.S. employees regard pay transparency (Smit & Montag-Smit, 2018). Although in the current study's sample, there does not seem to be a preference for secrecy, additional research is necessary to identify best practices for implementing transparency policies in ways that will be broadly accepted by employees in the U.S.

Finally, from a methods standpoint, we acknowledge that a significant challenge with developing and utilizing a pay transparency manipulation involves the conflation of transparency with the elucidation of the link between pay and performance. Theoretically, these are distinct aspects of an overall performance management system implemented in an organization; however, they are not easily disentangled operationally. Pay secrecy necessarily obscures the employee-perceived link between pay and performance, thereby making it difficult or perhaps impossible to create a realistic manipulation of transparency while holding the pay-for-performance aspect constant.

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, the current study represents a first step in demonstrating a causal link between pay transparency and applicant attitudes and intentions. In this sample, we somewhat surprisingly found an overall preference for pay transparency over secrecy. Therefore, it is important to replicate this finding to determine if favorability toward pay transparency is a legitimate trend. It is our hope that the research on pay policies will move forward in identifying best practices for implementing those policies in responsible ways that minimize employee privacy concerns and other types of backlash while promoting promote equity, inclusion, and trust.

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