

**The Importance of Recruitment
in Job Choice:
A Different Way of Looking**

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Abstract

Recent literature reviews have called into question the impact of recruitment activities on applicants' job choices. However, most previous findings have been based on cross-sectional ratings obtained immediately after initial screening interviews, thus raising questions about the degree to which prior conclusions are bound to that particular methodology. In contrast, the present study used longitudinal structured interviews to let job seekers explain, in their own words, how they made critical job search and choice decisions. Interview transcripts revealed that recruitment practices played a variety of roles in job seeker decisions. For example, consistent with signalling theory, subjects interpreted a wide variety of recruitment experiences (recruiter competence, sex composition of interview panels, recruitment delays) as symbolic of broader organizational characteristics. In addition, a number of "contingency" variables emerged that seemed to affect the perceived signalling value of recruitment experiences (e.g., prior knowledge of the company, functional area of the recruiter). Also notable were the strongly negative effects of recruitment delays, particularly among male students with higher grade point averages and greater job search success. Finally, our results suggest that certain applicant reactions may be systematically related to sex, work experience, grade point average, and search success. The article concludes with practical and research implications.

Recent research findings have cast doubt on the importance of recruitment in applicants' job choices. For example, a recent meta-analysis concluded that the presentation of "realistic" versus "inflated" recruitment messages has little, if any, effect on applicants' job acceptance rates (Premack & Wanous, 1985). Similarly, it has been argued that recruiters have little effect on job choices, once job characteristics are taken into account (Powell, 1984; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987). Recruitment delays and other administrative aspects have also been reported to have little apparent impact on applicants' decisions (e.g., Rynes & Boudreau, 1986; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987).

However, these recent findings are at odds with earlier research which suggested that recruiters, recruitment timing, and other aspects of the job search process might have substantial effects on the allocation of applicants to vacancies (Rynes, Heneman & Schwab, 1980). For example, using an interview methodology, Glueck (1973) concluded that "in over a third of the cases, the recruiter was the major reason the applicant chose a particular company" (p. 78). Additionally, on the basis of archival data, Arvey, Gordon, Massengill & Mussio (1975) found that delays between recruitment phases had substantial effects on the size and composition of the applicant pool. Similarly, Soelberg's (1967) longitudinal tracking of job-seeking business students suggested that recruitment timing (e.g., getting to an applicant before other employers do) might have substantial effects on eventual choices.

The popular press also appears to attach greater importance to recruitment than do recent academic findings. Professional and business journals continue to assert that applicants can be wooed not only through improved job attributes, but also through better-planned and more attentive

recruitment procedures (e.g., Bureau of National Affairs, 1989; Marcus, 1982; Stoops, 1984). Recent job acceptees also stress the importance of competent recruitment practices in securing applicants' acceptances (Gerstner, 1966; Luck, 1988).

In sum, although recent academic research has tended to conclude that little variance in applicants' decisions is accounted for by recruitment practices, earlier academic research and the practitioner literature suggest that recruitment experiences can be very important in job choice. Hence, two questions arise: What factors account for these different views, and is one "more correct" than the other?

Neither question, particularly the second, can be answered definitively on the basis of current evidence. However, following an extensive review of the job search and choice literatures, Schwab, Rynes and Aldag (1987) concluded that "different results were clearly associated with substantial differences in the methodology employed" and that, as a result, "judgments must be made about the likely sources of invalidity of the various approaches" (pp. 153-154).

Accordingly, Schwab et al. (1987) examined likely sources of invalidity for the two most common job choice methodologies: cross-sectional questionnaire rating research (the dominant recent method) and longitudinal interview research. Although strengths and weaknesses were acknowledged for both approaches, Schwab et al. concluded that, on balance, open-ended longitudinal research was likely to give a truer picture of applicants' search and choice processes:

"Although previous studies of sequential search have left some unanswered questions, we nevertheless believe that the methodologies used by these researchers are likely to prove

more useful....For one thing, sequential methodologies have traced job seekers' reactions over time. This would seem to be a prerequisite for observing the full range of search and evaluation behaviors, as well as the great variation in strategies that may be employed by different individuals".....Demand characteristics (in questionnaire rating research) may cause subjects to provide expectancy, instrumentality, and valence estimates for multiple attributes, even though they do not actually make their decisions on the basis of those attributes" (p. 154-155).

Similar conclusions were reached by Rynes and Barber (1990), who reviewed previous recruitment research from an organizational strategy perspective:

"In most cases, existing studies are extremely simplistic when evaluated against real-world attraction complexities. In particular, most studies have examined single strategies and limited dependent variables at single phases of the attraction process. For example, recruiter research has been dominated by applicant impressions at the campus interview...with few exceptions, our present knowledge of actual practices is insufficient to provide much guidance...as such, we recommend that would-be prescriptive researchers begin by becoming more 'informed' by solid descriptive findings" (Rynes & Barber, pp. 305-307).

In light of the preceding comments, we felt there was a potentially major contribution to be made by letting job seekers tell us, in their own words, how they made the various decisions leading up to job choice. One anticipated benefit of this approach was to obtain a better understanding of the underlying "psychology" of job choice and its relationship to organizational recruitment practices. Another was its potential for generating future research questions by getting "closer" to the subjects of investigation:

"One finds many instances where closeness to sources of data made key insights possible -- Piaget's closeness to his children,

Freud's proximity to and empathy with his patients, Darwin's closeness to nature, and even Newton's intimate encounter with an apple. In short, closeness does not make bias and loss of perspective inevitable, and distance is no guarantee of objectivity" (Patton, 1990, p. 48).

The present research is based on structured, open-ended interviews conducted at two points in the job search process. According to Patton (1990), interviews are the most basic form of qualitative inquiry in that subjects' responses are unconstrained by "writing skills of the respondents, the impossibility of probing or extending responses, and the effort required of the person completing a (written) questionnaire." Although findings from this method are "longer, more detailed, and more variable in content" and "analysis is difficult because responses are neither systematic nor standardized," the method is regarded as valuable because it "enables the researcher to understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories" (Patton, p. 24).

In adopting this methodology, we are moving in a direction consistent with recent developments -- both empirical and theoretical -- in a wide variety of decision contexts (e.g., capital investment decisions, strategic business decisions; group decision processes). Empirically, for example, there has been a steady increase in qualitative, small-sample observational or interview studies that seek to determine how decision makers "construe reality" in particular environmental contexts (e.g., Eisenhardt, 1989a; Gersick, 1989; Isabella, 1990; Saunders & Jones, 1990). Theoretically, researchers have called for methodologies that would lead to a better balance between search and choice, process and outcome, and induction and deduction (e.g., Eisenhardt, 1989b; Lord & Maher, 1990; Tsoukas, 1989; Yin, 1989). The

present study represents an attempt to nudge the current balance in job search and recruitment research toward a greater concern for search, process, and contextual fidelity.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 41 graduating students from four colleges (arts and sciences, engineering, industrial relations, and business) of a major northeastern university. Because we wished to identify a wide range of recruitment experiences and reactions, the sample was chosen to be as broadly diversified as possible within size limitations.¹

Diversity was achieved with the help of the four placement directors, each of whom was asked to nominate ten job seekers who, taken as a set, would maximize variability on factors such as race, sex, academic performance, articulateness, self-insight, and likely employability.² Although certain "objective" elements of diversity (e.g., race, sex, grade point) could have been obtained through formal records, these characteristics often show little relationship to applicant reactions (e.g., Harris & Fink, 1987) or job search outcomes (Gerhart & Rynes, 1991; Smith, 1990). Because of their close contact with job-seeking students, placement directors were in the best position to identify less tangible -- but perhaps more important (see Rynes & Gerhart, 1990) -- determinants of job search experiences such as interpersonal skills, articulateness, self-confidence and goal orientation.

The end result of this nomination process was a sample that was, in fact, highly diversified in terms of background characteristics, job search and interview timing,³ search intensity, and search success (table 1). Moreover, the fact that "objective" qualifications (i.e., grade point averages, internships, work experience)⁴ were uncorrelated with any of the measures of search

success (e.g., site visits or job offers) suggests that our strategy to sample students with a wide range of intangible as well as observable characteristics was a wise one.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

There also were several statistically significant relationships among subjects' background characteristics. For example, those with full-time experience were less likely to participate in extracurricular activities and internships (Table 1). This makes sense because internships and extracurricular activities are often pursued as substitutes for full-time experience, prior to a first job search. In addition, males and graduate students began thinking about search earlier than did women and undergraduates, while students with higher grade point averages (GPAs) took later interviews.

The colleges sampled were also quite diverse (see Table 2). For example, colleges ranged from undergraduate only (arts and sciences) to mixed graduate-undergraduate (engineering and industrial relations) to graduate only (business). Colleges also differed in terms of the amount of prior work experience of their students ($F = 6.07$), the number of extracurricular activities ($F = 2.47$), and the number of campus interviews ($F = 3.71$).

(Insert Table 2 about here)

Procedure

In order to capture decision dynamics, each student was interviewed at two points in the job search process. Initial interviews were conducted in the first few weeks (late January-early February) of the second semester of 1990. At this point, most students had spent somewhere between 1-3 months in the campus interview process. A resume was also collected as part of the

interviewing procedure; this was used to generate information about work experience, grade point average, extracurricular activities and offices held.

The second round of interviews began in late March and continued until early May. The intent was to wait long enough to produce substantial variation in search experiences, but not so long that subjects became unavailable or unwilling to complete second interviews (final exams began in the second week of May). Within this range, attempts were made to schedule second interviews 8-10 weeks after the first, such that those who interviewed earlier in the first round also interviewed earlier in the second. However, scheduling was constrained to some extent by subject availability, given that subjects were still full-time students and traveling to anywhere between 1-20 site visits.

Interviewers were research assistants of the principal investigators and placement directors. All interviewers were given identical training prior to each interviewing round. Prior to finalizing interview content, all interviewers, the principal investigators, and the industrial relations placement director gathered together to discuss the entire interview, question-by-question. Any ambiguities about question wording or intent were resolved, and a revised interview prepared.

Interviews ranged from 20 minutes to more than an hour. Given that there were substantial differences in length across interviews conducted by the same interviewer, length appeared to be mainly a function of the articulateness and task involvement of the subject. Although longer interviews resulted in more numerous and/or elaborate "critical incidents," there is no evidence that length was systematically correlated with differences in response *content* (e.g., whether particular factors such as delays or recruiters were mentioned as being important to a decision).

Interview Questions

The data described in this paper were derived from a broader investigation of recruitment and job search processes. The principal investigators (and two of the placement officials) had long been intrigued by the frequency with which both recruiters and applicants mentioned the importance of "fit" in their decisions, often without being able to articulate precisely what they meant by the term (e.g., Bretz, Ash & Dreher, 1989; Ricklefs, 1979; Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). Given this interest, a decision was made to investigate how job seekers (and recruiters) assess fit over the course of the job search and recruitment process.

Given our limited understanding of both the fit construct (Rynes & Gerhart, 1990) and job choice processes in general (see Schwab, et al, 1987), the use of researcher-generated rating questionnaires seemed premature. Accordingly, a decision was made to use structured, open-ended interview questions based on a "critical incidents" approach (questions are reproduced in the appendix).

Although our methodology was not precisely identical to the critical incidents technique outlined by Flanagan (1954), both interviews were designed to elicit information about reactions to specific companies and specific decisions made with respect to those companies (e.g., not to accept a site visit). Hence, most of the data reported here do in fact refer to "critical" components of judgments and decisions, rather than to abstract impressions about recruiters, fit, or job choice in general. By having subjects focus first on particular organizations, events, or decisions, it was then easy for most of them to recall specific incidents that led to those impressions and decisions.

Within this general framework, the two interviews were segmented to tap different phases of the job search process. The first focused primarily on

how applicants form initial impressions of fit with various organizations. This question is of critical importance in filling interview schedules, but has been largely ignored in previous recruitment research (Rynes & Barber, 1990). Questions asked for three specific examples of good (perceived) fit, three examples of poor fit, examples of good fit and bad fit that ran counter to peer opinions, and positive and negative changes in assessments of fit since beginning job search. In each case, named examples were probed to determine the beliefs, incidents, or causes underlying the initial or changed fit assessment.

The second interview focused more on later phases of the search process (e.g., site visits and job choices) and general impressions of recruitment practices *per se*. These latter questions were added because, although the study had initially been conceived as a "fit" rather than a "recruitment" study, casual inspection of first-round transcripts suggested a large role for recruitment variables in general fit assessments. For this reason, several specific questions about recruitment (questions 12-14 in the appendix) were added to the second interview.⁵

Analyses

All 82 interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were read in their entirety by the three principal investigators, who independently designed alternative coding schemes for summarizing the data. After developing a consensus scheme and instructions, actual coding was performed by one of the investigators and a research assistant. The two coders agreed in 93% of the cases; the final 7% were resolved by a different principal investigator. On no question did interrater agreement fall below 85%. To facilitate reader comprehension, the specific coding of each question is discussed concurrently with the results.

Because the main point of this study was to gain insight into the cognitive processes associated with job search, statistical findings were supplemented by a considerable amount of content-based interpretation. That is, after reviewing the descriptive statistics pertaining to a particular question, transcripts were re-examined for insight into the incidents, judgments, and processes underlying the quantitative results. In most cases, content analysis added substantially to our understanding of the psychology and emotion (Lopes, 1987) of job search and choice decisions. Sample quotations are provided throughout the results section to illustrate this point.

Additional analyses (e.g., t-tests, one-way analyses of variance) were performed to detect potentially important relationships between applicants' personal characteristics and their search and choice behaviors. Although these analyses are clearly exploratory, they are nevertheless conservative in at least three ways. First, some real relationships are likely to go undetected due to our modest statistical power.⁶ Second, two-tailed significance tests were used throughout, despite the fact that reasonable directional hypotheses could have been offered in some cases (e.g., sex, work experience, search success), but were not due to space limitations. Third, the bulk of our questions were very nondirective, which probably led to underreporting of recruitment incidents by subjects with limited self-insight, articulateness, or motivation to be interviewed.

Results

On average, subjects attended 18.0 campus interviews, 6.6 site visits, and received 3.0 job offers. As such, the results that follow are based on a total of 738 campus interviews and 271 site visits.

*First Interview: Assessments of Initial Fit and Early Changes in Fit**Assessment*

At the beginning of the first interview, subjects were asked to name three companies they thought would provide the best fit to their employment objectives (question 2 in appendix), as well as three that would produce the worst fit (question 3). In addition, they were asked to name companies for which their personal assessments of good fit and poor fit ran counter to general impressions among their peers (questions 4 & 5).

Preliminary analyses of these questions revealed that three distinct sets of variables were responsible for early fit perceptions: (a) perceived job and organizational characteristics (hereafter shortened to "job characteristics"), (b) interactions with formal organizational representatives, and (c) contacts with other people (besides recruiters) already in the organization. Six variables were created to reflect these categories (three variables for positive fit responses, three for negative). Responses were coded "1" if the category was mentioned as a reason for inferring fit, and "0" otherwise. Thus, a subject who mentioned job characteristics and organizational acquaintances as reasons for positive fit assessments, but only recruitment experiences as a reason for negative fit assessments, would be coded "1,0,1,0,1,0."

Analyses revealed that every single subject mentioned job characteristics as important factors in positive assessments of initial fit (table 3, item 1). Although a full content analysis of job characteristic responses is beyond the scope of this paper (footnote 5), commonly mentioned characteristics included general company reputation, attitude toward the product or industry, perceived status of the subject's particular functional area (e.g., marketing, design, human resources) in the company, perceived training or advancement opportunities, and geographic location. Press

coverage appeared to play a considerable role in some subjects' impressions, particularly coverage concerning environmental sensitivity, business ethics, and personnel practices (e.g., laying off senior workers while hiring new ones; failure to give notice regarding impending layoffs).

In addition, 12 subjects specifically mentioned that initial contacts with company representatives had been responsible for early impressions of good fit:

"I was really impressed by __. They interviewed about a hundred people in a day. Then, based on the initial interview, people were asked to re-interview the next day in different divisions. So instead of just putting resumes in a pile and having people look at them, they were on the ball. Before we went through this process, they had a nice reception, they talked to us about it and explained how it worked...I was really impressed by that" (female engineering undergraduate).

"The woman from __ was top-notch and did a great job of recruiting. She was a real big factor in my decision to do the on-site with them and to follow through (female graduate in industrial relations; ultimately accepted this offer).

Exploratory analyses also revealed two background characteristics associated with the tendency to mention recruitment experiences as a basis for initial assessments of positive fit assessments. Specifically, those who mentioned recruitment had less full-time work experience ($t = 2.01$; $p < .05$) and began thinking later about job search ($t = 2.38$; $p < .05$).

Having friends or acquaintances already in the organization was at least partially responsible for positive assessments among nine subjects. All nine of these subjects were female, a significant difference at $p < .01$.

Turning to reasons for negative initial assessments of fit, 39 subjects mentioned job characteristics, 23 mentioned recruitment or recruiters, and one mentioned a disliked acquaintance. Note that the number forming

negative impressions on the basis of recruitment is nearly double the number forming positive impressions on this basis. Consider the following examples:

“_____ has a management training program which the recruiter had gone through (sic). She was talking about the great presentational skills that _____ teaches you, and the woman was barely literate. She was embarrassing. If that was the best they could do, I did not want any part of them. Also, _____ and _____’s recruiters appeared to have real attitude problems. I also thought they were chauvinistic.” (female arts undergraduate)

“One firm I didn’t think of talking to initially, but they called me and asked me to talk with them. So I did, and then the recruiter was very, very rude. Yes, *very* rude, and I’ve run into that a couple of times.” (female engineering graduate)

On average, those mentioning recruitment as a reason for negative impressions of initial fit had lower GPAs than those who didn’t ($t = 2.85$; $p < .01$).

Following questions about initial impressions, subjects were asked to consider whether they had *changed* their impressions of specific companies in either a positive or negative direction (questions 6-7 in appendix). Here, changes fell into two categories: changes due to acquisition of more detailed job information, and those due to recruitment representatives or practices. Again, these categories were not mutually exclusive; a subject could attribute a changed assessment to both reasons (coded “1,1”) or only one (“1,0” or “0,1”).

Ten subjects reported no negative changes in impressions regarding early favorites. Among those who did, 23 cited revised information about job characteristics, while 16 mentioned recruiters or recruitment experiences:

"For example, the ___ companies (specific industry) wouldn't put even one woman on my schedule. That scares me. I would ask to have a woman put on my schedule and at best, maybe there would be one" (female industrial relations graduate).

"The guy at the interview made a joke about how nice my nails were and how they were going to ruin them there due to all the tough work" (female engineering undergraduate).

There were also some differences in background characteristics among those who reported negative changes in assessment due to recruitment.

Those who attributed negative changes to recruitment had lower GPAs ($t = 2.19$; $p < .05$); more internship experience ($t = 1.90$; $p < .10$), and were more likely to be female ($t = 2.04$; $p < .05$).

In terms of positive changes in fit assessments (table 3, item 4), 20 attributed these changes to improved information about job characteristics, while 16 mentioned recruitment or organizational representatives:

"I wasn't sure of the fit at first. But after talking with people there, I feel there is a pretty good fit. I have talked to seven people there and liked all of them. They also hired a lot of people from (this program) last year. I look for sincerity and good followup when trying to assess fit" (female MBA).

"They invited me to a closed schedule, and I wasn't really sure. I didn't know enough about the company to decide whether I liked them or not. But I loved the people who came to interview me. I thought it was a really good sign that the company sent two women recruiters to interview. And then when I went down to my plant visit, probably half the people I saw on my schedule were female managers, and to me that's a big plus for the company" (female MBA, ultimately accepted this offer).

There were no discernible differences in background characteristics between those who mentioned recruitment as a reason for revised perceptions of fit in a positive direction, and those who didn't.

Second Interview: Later Changes in Assessments, Site Visits & Job Choices

The second interview began with general questions about the number of interviews, site visits and job offers acquired, and whether or not subjects had accepted an offer. These were followed by other questions concerning changes in impressions since the first interview.

One way of assessing changed evaluations was to ask whether the jobs accepted by subjects (or, in the case of the 10 without acceptances, the job they hoped or expected to accept) had been among their initial favorites. More than half our subjects ($n = 23$) said that it was not (table 3, item 5a). In addition, a cross-check of responses from the earlier interview revealed an additional two subjects who, although they said they had chosen an initial favorite, had not mentioned the chosen company as one of their three "best-fitting" companies in the first interview. In short, these findings suggest that more than half our subjects were open to a substantial amount of positive influence during the search and choice process.

Given the large proportion of individuals who took (or expected to take) jobs with companies that were not initially favored, it is instructive to examine the reasons behind the changes (item 5b). Nineteen of the 23 self-reported changers cited new information about the job or organization. In addition, 14 explicitly mentioned recruitment and/or the treatment they had received on site visits. Of particular importance were the status of the people met during recruitment, the extent to which applicants felt "specially" treated, the organization's flexibility in scheduling visits, and the professionalism of the site visit (e.g., amount of "down time"). Also, it is interesting to note that although we did not explicitly track all job offers, only one subject seemed to have changed favorites involuntarily. The rest all seemed to be genuinely enthusiastic toward their choices, consistent with earlier arguments that by

the time job-takers announce their decisions, they have adjusted their attitudes to be cognitively consistent with their decisions (Soelberg, 1967; Vroom, 1966).

In terms of individual differences, those who were positively influenced by recruitment treatment were more likely to be female ($t = 2.93$; $p < .01$), to have interviewed later ($t = 1.95$; $p < .10$), to have taken more site visits ($t = 1.88$; $p < .10$), and to have engaged in fewer extracurricular activities ($t = 2.30$; $p < .05$).

It is also instructive to look at changes in the opposite direction -- that is, why subjects lost interest in organizations that were once initial favorites (items 6a-b, table 3). Of the 35 subjects indicating that they had lost interest in at least one initial favorite, 20 mentioned improved information about job characteristics. However, 20 also mentioned organizational representatives and/or recruitment practices:

“___ had a set schedule for me which they deviated from regularly. Times overlapped, and one person kept me too long which pushed the whole day back. They almost seemed to be saying that it was my fault that I was late for the next one! I guess a lot of what they did just wasn't very professional. Even at the point when I was done, where most companies would have a cab pick you up, I was in the middle of a snowstorm in Chicago and they said, 'You can get a cab downstairs.' There weren't any cabs. I literally had to walk 12 or 14 blocks with my luggage, trying to find some way to get to the airport. They didn't book me a hotel for the night of the snowstorm so I had to sit in the airport for 8 hours trying to get another flight...they wouldn't even reimburse me for the additional plane fare” (female industrial relations graduate student).

“I had a very bad campus interview experience...the person who came was a last minute fill-in...I think he had a couple of “issues” and was very discourteous during the interview. He was one step away from yawning in my face...The other thing

he did was that he kept making these (nothing illegal, mind you) but he kept making these references to the fact that I had been out of my undergraduate and first graduate programs for more than ten years now..." (female MBA with 10 years experience).

Another nine volunteered that delays caused their loss of interest. On average, those who mentioned delays as a reason for losing interest had more job offers than those who did not ($t = 2.79$; $p < .01$).

A more behaviorally-based question pertaining to loss of interest concerned whether (and why) job seekers had turned down any invitations for site visits (items 7a-b, table 3). Twenty-eight subjects turned down at least one visit, the most frequent reason being that the invitation came too late in the process (20 cases). Fifteen refused visits because they perceived the job to be less attractive than their other alternatives, while six cited a combination of timing and perceived job attractiveness.

On average, experienced workers ($t = 2.19$; $p < .05$) and graduate students ($t = 2.18$; $p < .05$) were less likely to reject site visits due to lateness. These findings suggest greater tolerance for prolonged job search among applicants who have worked before.

Three respondents turned down site visits because of negative experiences with campus recruiters. This is a fairly dramatic response to a poor recruiter, although the numbers involved are quite small. Because negative reactions of one interview party probably "infect" the other party as well (Dipboye, 1982; Eder & Buckley, 1988), it seems likely that many applicants who had negative reactions to particular recruiters did not receive any further invitations to "reject."

Second Interview: Reactions to Recruitment Practices

Up to this point, all reported results were obtained in response to questions that did not ask anything about recruitment practices *per se*. In the sections that follow, we report on responses to direct questions about recruiters, delays, and general recruitment practices.

Recruiters. Previous research has suggested that recruiters do not have much impact on job choices, particularly when compared against characteristics of the vacancy itself (e.g., Rynes, in press; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Wanous & Colella, 1989). However, these findings have typically been obtained with respect to subject ratings of the most recent interview experience. As such, they are likely to underestimate the extent to which “extreme” recruiter behaviors might influence decisions. For this reason, we asked subjects how much their willingness to accept job offers was influenced by either “very good” or “very poor” recruiters (question 13; appendix).

Open-ended responses to this question fell into three categories: strong influence (coded “2”), some or “qualified” influence (e.g., “It depends on whether I have other offers” or “It depends on how much I know about the company,” coded “1”), and little or no influence (coded “0”). As table 3 indicates (item 8), the vast majority of subjects felt that they were either strongly or somewhat influenced by recruiters. The only background characteristic that differentiated the degree of reported influence was the number of offices held ($r = .27$; $p < .05$).

Content analysis was very revealing in terms of the psychological mechanisms underlying the degree of influence. Generally speaking, influence seemed to depend almost entirely on the extent to which recruiters were seen as reliable signals of what it would be like to work for the company:

