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Abstract

This research shows how job postings can lead job candidates to see themselves as particularly deserving of hiring and high salary. We propose that these entitlement beliefs entail both personal motivations to see oneself as deserving and the ability to justify those motivated judgments. Accordingly, we predict that people feel more deserving when qualifications for a job are vague and thus amenable to motivated reasoning, whereby people use information selectively to reach a desired conclusion. We tested this hypothesis with a two-phase experiment ($N = 892$) using materials drawn from real online job postings. In the first phase of the experiment, participants believed themselves to be more deserving of hiring and deserving of higher pay after reading postings composed of vaguer types of qualifications. In the second phase, yoked observers believed that participants were less entitled overall, but did not selectively discount endorsement of vaguer qualifications, suggesting they were unaware of this effect. A follow-up pre-registered experiment ($N = 905$) using postings with mixed qualification types replicated the effect of including more vague qualifications on participants' entitlement beliefs. Entitlement beliefs are widely seen as problematic for recruitment and retention, and these results suggest that reducing the inclusion of vague qualifications in job postings would dampen the emergence of these beliefs in applicants, albeit at the cost of decreasing application rates and lowering applicants' confidence.

Keywords: Entitlement; deservingness; motivated reasoning; recruitment practice; selection

Motivated Reasoning during Recruitment

To build a strong workforce, companies must recruit and retain qualified employees. Researchers note that these tasks are difficult given increasing concerns about *entitlement* beliefs; workers see themselves as deserving unrealistically high pay or other resources (Harvey & Dasborough, 2015; Jordan, Ramsay, & Westerlaken, 2016; Twenge, 2006). Such concerns have also garnered attention in the popular press. As a post in *The New York Times* "You're the Boss" blog noted, "The notion that some employees seem to think they are owed something just for showing up is a difficult pill to swallow…" (Mueller, 2012). These beliefs would be consistent with the legal understanding of entitlement, whereby outcomes are prescribed by formal or normative rights and are not contingent on one's actions. However, they are not consistent with typical hiring and compensation practices, usually featuring outcomes contingent on contributions and achievements. Employees' entitlement beliefs thus pose major problems for managers (Fisk, 2010) and warrant investigation of the sources of these beliefs.

Although discussions of entitlement beliefs often center on millennials (Bisceglia, 2014; Twenge, 2006), some managers report equal or greater problems with entitlement beliefs in older employees (Mueller, 2012). Indeed, data suggest that millennials' sense of entitlement may not differ substantially from that of their older colleagues (Baird, 2015; Roberts, Edmonds, & Grijalva, 2010). It is clear that feelings of entitlement are multiply determined, and that particular situations foster or limit the opportunity to develop these feelings (Jordan et al., 2016; Fisk, 2010). In this paper we investigate one causal factor whereby situations contribute to entitlement beliefs. We show that differences in recruitment postings account for substantial variance in beliefs about whether a person deserves a job and what salary they deserve.

Managers construct recruitment postings by describing three factors: (1) the personal attributes applicants should have (e.g., "must be conscientious"), (2) the actions applicants should be willing to perform in the job in the future (e.g., "ability to learn business strategies and understand the marketing process"), and (3) the actions they should have performed in the past (e.g., "experience with media buying"). Applicants are not impartial in considering whether they satisfy these qualifications. Instead, a personal motivation to believe in one's deservingness impacts the type of information used in the decision process. *Motivated reasoning* occurs when people who desire to reach particular conclusions use information selectively to justify those conclusions (Boiney, Kennedy, & Nye, 1997; Kunda, 1990). We test whether qualifications based on attributes and future actions, which we predict allow for motivated reasoning, heighten entitlement compared to qualifications based on past actions.

Entitlement Beliefs

A "sense of entitlement" sounds and usually is pejorative, but entitlement beliefs are not inherently negative. People may believe they are entitled to eat cake because they worked hard (Kivetz & Zheng, 2006), or believe they are entitled to the pay that an employer promised. Without commenting on who is correct, we note that problems arise when employees' beliefs diverge from managers' beliefs. Given the consequences of entitled thinking, we offer managers insight into when and why some employees, who contribute equal or less, believe they deserve more, in the form of promotions or pay, than others (Fisk, 2010; Naumann, Minsky, & Sturman, 2002; Tomlinson, 2012).

We argue that entitlement beliefs about specific outcomes like a job or a salary reflect a two-fold process. First, personal desires to reap favourable outcomes converge with, second, the cognitive justification that those outcomes are deserved (Ross & Sicoly, 1979; Thompson &

Loewenstein, 1992). Psychological research on motivated reasoning establishes that people want desirable outcomes but also want to feel they deserve them (Kunda, 1990). When people get what they deserve, individuals feel the world is predictable, meaningful, and easier to navigate (Hafer & Begue, 2005; Lerner & Simmons, 1966; Montada & Lerner, 1998). Moreover, favorable outcomes increase recipients' self-worth and esteem when they seem fairly determined (De Cremer, Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, Mullenders, & Stinglhamber, 2005).

Thus, we suggest that recruitment procedures allowing applicants freedom to utilize motivated reasoning to *justify* receiving desirable outcomes will produce stronger entitlement. Take a hypothetical person applying for an attractive job. The desire to have the job, and to justify deserving it, encourages motivated reasoning when the candidate considers her suitability. She can interpret vague qualifications in ways allow her to believe she has satisfied or will satisfy them. She can also consider personal information that is not explicitly stated in a job ad and which an employer might even find irrelevant. She can give more weight to qualifications, stated or unstated, that she satisfies and less to those she does not satisfy. Moreover, these and other forms of motivated reasoning and subsequent entitlement beliefs may arise more often and in stronger form when qualifications are vague and open to interpretation, but be mitigated when qualifications are more specific and concrete, a question as of yet untested.

Recruitment Practices and Motivated Reasoning

We examined whether some types of qualifications that employers solicit when gathering information about potential employees produce higher entitlement beliefs among applicants. A 2016 examination of more than 4 million job postings in the United States categorized qualifications as pertaining to personality traits (e.g., conscientiousness), domain skills (e.g., programming skills) or generic skills (e.g., numerical skills, good communication) (Aspiring

Minds, 2016). Mapping these distinctions onto those made in entitlement research, where Lerner (1987) referred to entitlement beliefs as "the judgment, often tacit, that someone, or some category of people, is entitled to a particular set of outcomes by virtue of who they are or what they have done" (p. 108)[1], we refer to the qualifications pertaining to "who you are" as attributes and those describing "what you've done" as actions.

Although both attribute and action qualifications can increase perceived deserving, we propose that attributes do so relatively more. This prediction is derived from the recognition that attributes like personality traits are more abstract (Cantor & Mischel, 1979; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Mischel & Shoda 1995; Trope, 1986, 1989) and hence more ambiguous than actions. As a result, people can evaluate their attributes in ways that serve their self-interested motives. For instance, people claim to possess more of a personality characteristic, like extraversion, when it is described positively rather than negatively, and are able to do so because the attribute is ambiguous (Kunda & Sanitioso, 1989; Sanitioso, Kunda, & Fong, 1990). People justify these self-serving descriptions by using their own strengths to construct the definition of specific attributes (Dunning, Perie, & Story, 1991). For example, participants who believed they were particularly strong in math skills defined "intelligence" through mathematical ability more so than participants who believed themselves strong in verbal ability. Actions, in contrast, are less ambiguous, so they are less amenable to idiosyncratic definition. People are unable to plausibly claim having committed specific actions unless they actually have. Because of their ambiguous and vague nature, it is possible to apply motivated reasoning; as a result, attribute qualifications should increase the entitlement beliefs of job candidates more than certain action qualifications.

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[1] Building on this work, Feather (1999) reserves the term *entitlement* for outcomes following regulations that define relevant attributes, and the term *deservingness* for outcomes that are earned on the basis of a person's actions. We do not adopt Feather's terminology because both attributes and actions make people qualified for jobs, and one needs a single term to label judgment in light of qualifications.

Hypothesis 1: Individuals who see job postings composed of attribute qualifications will believe they are more deserving of being hired, and deserve to be paid more, than individuals who see job postings composed of past action qualifications.

If it is the ambiguity of attributes that allows people to justify entitled beliefs, then similarly the uncertain nature of what one might accomplish in the future should promote personal feelings of entitlement. Like attributes, future actions are indefinite and irrefutable in the present. As such, future actions, like attributes, offer ample freedom for the application of motivated reasoning. People are less constrained in making predictions about their future than in reporting on their past (Helzer & Dunning, 2012). Indeed, people use this freedom to give themselves credit for their good future intentions and believe that their own intentions are highly indicative of who they are as a person (Kruger & Gilovich, 2004). For instance, students' publicizing their intentions of studying the law created a premature sense of already possessing the aspirational identity of lawyer (Gollwitzer, Sheeran, Michalski, & Seifert, 2009). Alternatively, people have relatively little flexibility in claiming they performed a particular behaviour in the past if they did not. For instance, participants were unable to describe themselves in such flattering ways when required to use specified, concrete past actions (e.g., worked as a DJ; Dunning, Meyerowitz, & Holzberg, 1989). We predict that, like attributes, qualifications describing actions that can be performed in the future are vaguer and as a result increase the entitlement beliefs of applicants more than qualifications describing actions that must have been performed in the past.

While it is possible that applicants could recognize that other candidates similarly satisfy qualifications when they are vague, we do not anticipate these results. Entitled beliefs arise in part because of differential accessibility of information about oneself rather than others—an

effect referred to as egocentrism. Individuals are privy to more information about themselves than others, which can be used to serve motivated purposes. Moreover, decision-makers tend to focus on the qualifications of a specified target of the judgment rather than the qualifications of comparison group—an effect referred to as focalism (Kruger & Burrus, 2004). As a result, when individuals consider their own hirability and salary in light of vague qualifications, research suggests they will call upon and utilize their own idiosyncratic and relatively richer personal history at the expense of information about the competition.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals who see job postings composed of future action qualifications will believe they are more deserving of being hired, and deserve to be paid more, than individuals who see job postings composed of past action qualifications.

Finally, motivated reasoning serves personal motives rather than the interests of others (Kunda, 1990). If entitlement beliefs reflect motivated reasoning and a personal interest in promoting one's own hirability and high salary, then entitlement beliefs should be reduced when external, third-party observers evaluate a candidate's suitability for a position and high salary. To the extent that personal motivations shape deservingness judgments, individuals should see themselves as more deserving than do observers when evaluating that candidate.

Hypothesis 3: Individuals will believe they are more deserving of being hired, and deserve to be paid more, compared to yoked observers who are privy to information about which qualifications the individual satisfies.

Pre-Study

The pre-study had three aims. First, we collected ecologically valid materials for the subsequent experiment. Second, we categorized the qualifications used in actual companies' actual job postings, testing our proposed taxonomic structure of attributes, future actions, and

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past actions could. Third, we verified that qualifications describing attributes or future actions are more open to interpretation in their meaning—a prerequisite for the application of motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990)—than past action qualifications.

Procedure

Job postings were obtained from the online aggregator Indeed.com in the spring of 2016. This website listed 24 "Popular Job Searches" and we used the first 10 postings listed under 17 of these searches: Customer Service, Healthcare, Data Entry, Nursing, Part Time, Retail, Insurance, IT, Sales, Human Resources, Graphic Design, Marketing, Education, Accounting, Maintenance, Clerical, and Finance.[2] We identified the separate qualifications each of the 170 postings listed, yielding a total of 1527 non-unique qualifications. We sorted them randomly and presented them in 15 different lists of approximately 100 qualifications for coding and rating.

With the goal of generalizing to the global worker pool (Landers & Behrend, 2015) we recruited coders, raters, and participants in the subsequent experiments via Prolific Academic (prolific.ac), a platform for conducting research designed as an alternative to Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk. Prolific Academic has large international participant pool with the ability to pre-screen participants on demographic variables (e.g., country, gender, age, employment status). A requirement to compensate participants an effective rate of £5 per hour or more helps to maintain a high quality of response (see Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, & Acquisiti, 2017).

The coders ($N = 45$) and raters ($N = 45$) were individuals over 18 years of age, employed full-time or part-time and not currently students, located in the United States. They were compensated £2.50 (approximately \$3.25) for coding or rating approximately 100 qualifications,

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[2] The omitted searches were those that were highly specialized or else overlapped substantively with the included categories: Driver, Warehouse, Summer, Call Center, Online, Construction, and Entry Level.

plus completing the materials for two unrelated brief studies. Each participant either coded qualifications for type or rated qualifications for specificity.

Qualification type. Three people coded each qualification as a personal attribute, future action, past action, or "none of these." Coders received examples of each category and the following definitions of each category to guide their decision: Qualifications that described "A quality (or attribute or trait) about the type of person this is (e.g., a personality characteristic or a tendency to act a certain way)" should be coded as *personal attributes*; qualifications that described "An action a person must do in the future (e.g., a task they would perform in the job)" should be coded as *future actions*, and qualifications that described "An action a person must have done in the past (e.g., a degree they've earned or a skill they've acquired)" should be coded as *past actions*. We clarified that the category *past actions* "includes things that must be done in the future, like typing 60 words per minute, if they rely on skills that were acquired in the past."[3] If a qualification did not fit any of these three categories, they marked "none of these."

Specificity. Three different people rated how vague or specific each qualification was, using a 5-point scale (1=*extremely specific/concrete*, 5=*extremely vague/open to interpretation*).

Results and Discussion

Results of the coding for qualification type (attribute, future action, or past action) indicated that these three categories were representative of the job postings, and that it was relatively easy for people to consistently identify a given qualification as one of the three types. For 828 qualifications (54.2%), all 3 coders agreed, and for another 613 (40.1%), 2 of the 3

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[3] For example, "Willingness to comprehend core commercial real estate concepts" and "Comfort and agility with transitioning between heavy data entry and analysis of electronic interface of data" were coded as future actions, whereas "Demonstrated knowledge of compensation and benefit administration and HIPAA, ERISA, and COBRA regulations" and "Results Orientation: Demonstrated ability to meet deadlines to achieve performance goals, while focused on efficient & effective problem resolution" were coded as past actions.

coders agreed. On only 86 statements (5.6%) did no coders agree;[4] these statements were omitted from further analysis. We assigned remaining qualification statements to the category that 2 or more coders identified. Of the 1441 qualifications where at least 2 coders agreed, 463 qualifications (32.1%) were attributes, 268 (18.6%) were future actions, and 707 (49.1%) were past actions (see Table 1). Only 3 qualifications (0.2%) were coded as "none of these."[5]

We used specificity of the qualifications, rated by a different set of individuals to establish whether personal attribute and future action qualifications are more open to interpretation than past actions. Cronbach's alpha for the specificity ratings was .57. We computed a mean across the 3 raters. An ANOVA comparing rated specificity of the three types of qualifications was significant, $F(2, 1435) = 212.48$, $p < .001$. As hypothesized, attributes ($M = 3.05$, $SD = .83$) were the most vague, followed by future actions ($M = 2.52$, $SD = .90$); past actions were rated the most specific ($M = 2.04$, $SD = .80$). Post-hoc tests (using Sidak adjustment for multiple comparisons in this and all subsequent post-hoc tests) showed all groups were significantly different from one another, ps $< .001$.

These results support our claim that attributes and future actions are vaguer and less specific than past actions, supporting the claim that they create a situation open to the possibility of idiosyncratic definition. However, two points are worth noting. First, differences in rated specificity are averages; not all attributes and future actions are vaguer than all past actions. We return to this point in the General Discussion. It is also important to acknowledge that the qualifications surely vary in ways other than their pertaining to attributes versus future actions versus past actions. Although our coders were able to categorize the vast majority of the

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[4] Examples of statements on which all coders disagreed are: "Must successfully pass pre-employment screening" and "A desire to learn about—if not an existing interest in—payments technology, security and trends."
[5] These qualifications were "new graduates are encourage [sic] to apply," "EMC and 3PAR storage," and "License: None required."

qualifications into these three categories, there are likely to be other ways of dividing them. In testing the effects of the qualifications on entitlement beliefs in the subsequent experiments, we took care to recruit samples large enough to identify the hypothesized effects in spite of these two sources of noise. The first of these subsequent experiments used a two-phase design to test whether entitlement beliefs emerge when vague attributes and future action qualifications are combined with a personal motivation to feel justified in holding such beliefs about the self.

Experiment 1

In Phase 1 of the first experiment, which tested H1 and H2, we used the qualifications coded in the pre-study to construct new postings for a hypothetical desirable job. We asked new participants to indicate how many qualifications in a given posting they satisfied. If the vague nature of certain qualifications allows for motivated reasoning, we hypothesized that participants who saw postings composed of attributes or future actions would be able to indicate that they satisfied more of the qualifications than participants who saw postings composed of past actions. By virtue of signaling more qualifications, we predicted that participants exposed to postings featuring attributes and future actions should feel more deserving of being hired and deserving of being paid a higher salary than those exposed to postings featuring past actions.

In the Phase 2 of the experiment, which tests H3, we examined the influence of personal motivations to see oneself as deserving on entitled thinking. To do this, we assessed judgments made by external yoked observers of Phase 1 participants' deservingness based on the qualifications Phase 1 participants had endorsed. Self-assessments of deserving are affected by personal motivations to achieve desired outcomes that are absent for externally yoked observers; as a result, the comparison of judgments made by Phase 1 participants against Phase 2 yoked observers allows for a test of the unique influence of personal motivation in judgment (e.g. Seta

& Seta, 1996). That is, we assume that the desire to have the job leads candidates to apply motivated reasoning to considering their suitability. They may give themselves credit for information other than the specific job qualifications they satisfy, for instance. They are able to do so because they have more information about themselves from which to draw than others have about them (Kruger, 1999). Of course, motivation is likely to affect the responses people give even beyond the extent to which it affects the deservingness they feel. For instance, applicants may also state that they deserve high pay as a negotiation tactic. Because of various personal motivations, we expected that observers would judge participants to be less deserving of a job offer and deserving of a lower salary, compared to participants' own self-assessments.

Satisfaction of more qualifications desired by a company, regardless of type, should serve as justification for deservingness. As such, just as individuals who self-report satisfying more qualifications also report greater deserving, yoked observers who see that individuals hold more qualifications should report greater deserving for these more qualified individuals. If, however, observers recognize that attributes and future actions are more open to idiosyncratic interpretation, they should discount the entitlement of individuals who saw these types of qualifications compared to individuals who saw past action qualifications. In this way, the yoked design allows for an exploratory investigation of the degree to which people are aware of and adjust for the two-fold process that gives rise to entitled thinking. If the role of motivated reasoning in exploiting vague qualifications is obvious to the average observer, then we should find an interaction effect of qualification type by perceiver (self versus yoked observer) indicating that yoked observers adjust their determinations of job applicants' deserving as a function of the nature of the qualifications these individuals saw.

Participants and Design

Phase 1. Participants were 452 adults recruited via Prolific Academic[6] and compensated £2 for completing materials below and two short studies that followed. They were residents of the United States (*n* = 171, 38%), United Kingdom (*n* = 272, 60%), Ireland (*n* = 7, 2%), and Australia (*n* = 2, < 1%). The sample included 200 men, 249 women, and 3 "other"-gendered individuals; ages ranged from 18 to 67 (*M* = 35 years, *SD* = 9.72). The average annual household income of those who were willing to disclose it (95%) fell between $40,001 and $50,000. We randomly assigned participants to respond to a job posting comprised of qualifications referencing personal attributes (*n* = 149), future actions (*n* = 151), or past actions (*n* = 152).

Phase 2. Participants were approximately equal in age and average household income to Phase 1, ranging in age from 18 to 67 (*M* = 34 years, *SD* = 11.01) and with the average annual household income of those willing to disclose it (94%) falling in the range $40,001 to $50,000.

Phase 2 participants were each yoked to a unique participant who completed the Phase 1 materials, based on gender and country of residence; we did not yoke anyone to 3 participants who indicated being "other"-gendered individuals, or to 7 Australian and 2 Irish respondents from since these subgroups were too small. Accordingly, as yoked observers, we recruited 440 new adults residing in the US or UK to match the 440 male and female participants from the US or UK who completed the first phase of the experiment.

Procedure

Phase 1. Prospective participants learned that they would respond to information in a job posting. In line with our hypotheses about motivated reasoning, we took care to make the job sound attractive. After providing consent and indicating in which of 4 countries (United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Ireland) they were located, participants read:

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[6] In this and the subsequent samples, participants had indicated in Prolific Academic's pre-screening that they were employed full-time or part-time, had approval ratings of 90% or better on previous work, and had not taken part in any other study reported here.

This company is currently seeking to fill several highly desirable positions. We are looking for individuals with the qualifications listed below. In this list, please mark all of the qualifications that apply to you. *Please note that this list is compiled across multiple departments; there may be some overlap or differences in formatting.

They then saw a list of 20 qualifications drawn at random from those compiled in the pre-study. Participants in the personal attributes condition saw 20 qualifications drawn from the list of 463 personal attributes coded as such in in the pre-study. Participants in the future actions condition saw 20 qualifications drawn from the list of 268 future actions. Participants in the past actions condition saw 20 qualifications drawn from the list of 707 past actions. The final sentence of the instructions above was included to explain the fact that the random draw sometimes produced an unusual or seemingly incomplete list of qualifications. After marking the qualifications they satisfied, and being shown a message indicating how many and which of the 20 they had marked, participants responded to two indicators of entitlement beliefs: "Do you feel you deserve a job with our company?" (1=*definitely not*, 7=*definitely yes*), and "If hired, what is the annual salary you deserve to be paid?" For the latter measure, participants entered a numerical answer in the currency corresponding to the country they had identified earlier. For ease of understanding, all participants were asked first about deserving of the job and then about salary.

Thereafter, they completed two short, unrelated studies, before providing demographic information: age, ethnicity, gender, current employment status, and combined household annual salary (a list of 11 categories in US$ plus the option "prefer not to disclose"). We used the responses of participants in Phase 1 to prepare stimuli for Phase 2, which was conducted approximately 2 months later.

Phase 2. After providing consent, participants read: "We recently showed job advertisements to people via Prolific. On the next page you will see the exact information that one participant saw and how that person responded." They then saw information about a participant who, as they learned, was of their same gender and country of residence. They learned about that participant's age and reported average annual household income range (in US$ or "preferred not to disclose") and were told the number of qualifications (out of 20) the participant had marked in the job posting he or she saw. They saw the exact ad the original participant had seen, with the relevant qualification boxes checked or left unmarked by the original participant. The yoked observer participants were not able to advance beyond this screen until at least 60 seconds had passed. Thereafter, they were asked, "Do you feel this person deserves a job with the company?" (1=*definitely not*, 7=*definitely yes*) and "If hired, what is the annual salary this person deserves to be paid?" As had original participants, Phase 2 participants reported the salary in their own country's currency. Participants then provided their own demographic information as described in Phase 1.

Results and Discussion

Phase 1. Because of their vague nature and participants' personal motivation to do so, we anticipated that participants would endorse more qualifications in the personal attributes and future actions conditions. Indeed, the number of items endorsed varied as a function of qualification type, $F(2, 449) = 100.25$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .31$. Participants endorsed more personal attributes ($M = 13.84$, $SD = 5.14$) than future actions ($M = 12.03$, $SD = 4.75$); they endorsed the fewest qualifications in the past actions condition ($M = 6.96$, $SD = 2.95$). All conditions significantly differed from one another, ps $\leq .001$. A given qualification from the entire pool of qualifications listed in all the coded postings was nearly 100% more likely to be endorsed by the

average candidate if it was a personal attribute rather than a past action, and 75% more likely to be endorsed if it was an action to be performed in the future rather than in the past.

Similarly, participants differed in the extent to which they felt they deserved the job across the three ad types, $F(2, 447) = 26.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$ (Table 2).[7] The effect of condition remained significant after controlling for age (as a covariate)[8] and gender, annual household income category, and country of residence (as additional factors), $F(2, 430) = 27.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_{partial} = .11$. Over and above these variables, estimated marginal mean deservingness was highest in the personal attributes condition ($M = 5.40$) followed by future actions ($M = 4.75$) and past actions ($M = 4.14$). All conditions significantly differed from one another, $ps \le .001$.

Next, we tested whether the differences in entitlement beliefs about being hired extended to entitlement beliefs about annual pay. Approximately 16% of respondents had given answers less than 1000 which were presumably shorthand; these responses were multiplied by 1000. Responses from participants in the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Australia were then converted to US$ using current exchange rates at xe.com. Participants felt deserving of annual salaries ranging from $5,608 to $400,003 ($M = \$34,630$, $SD = 29457$). We log-transformed responses to reduce the influence of outliers and report estimated marginal means transformed back to dollars.

As predicted, entitlement beliefs about salary differed by qualification condition, $F(2, 449) = 3.09$, $p = .047$, $\eta^2_{partial} = .014$ (Table 2). Controlling for age, gender, annual household income category, and country of residence, all of which were significant predictors of deserved salary, the effect of qualifications condition remained significant, $F(2, 432) = 5.11$, $p = .006$, $\eta^2_{partial} = .023$. Adjusted for these other variables, participants felt deserving of an annual salary

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[7] Two participants chose not to respond to this question.
[8] The main effect of age as a covariate was not significant. One might further wonder whether younger participants took more advantage of the vague qualification types to justify their deservingness. This does not seem to be the case; there was no interaction effect of qualifications condition by age when predicting deserving of being hired, $F(2, 428) = .35$, $p = .70$, $\eta^2_{partial} = .002$ or deserved salary, $F(2, 430) = 1.45$, $p = .24$, $\eta^2_{partial} = .007$.

of $25,771 in the personal attributes condition, $26,370 in the future actions condition, and $23,040 in the past actions condition. Post-hoc tests showed that salary entitlement in the personal attributes condition was higher than in the past actions condition, $p = .043$, and in the future actions versus past actions condition, $p = .009$, while entitlement in attributes and future actions conditions did not significantly differ, $p = .95$. These effects on salary are particularly noteworthy in light of participants' unmeasured variation in field of work, career stage, and local cost of living, variation which surely adds noise to their judgments of deserved salary.

Finally, we tested whether the effect of qualifications condition on perceived deserving of the job was mediated by the number of qualifications participants were able to endorse. Mediation analyses were conducted using PROCESS v2.15 (Hayes 2013), Model 4, with covariates age, gender, annual household income, and country of residence. In order to use these covariates we excluded participants reporting a gender other than male or female, from Ireland and Australia, and who had indicated "prefer not to disclose" for annual household income category, leaving $N = 418$. Because the independent variable qualifications condition has 3 categories, the indirect effects are estimated for two dummy code variables, with the past actions condition as the reference group (assigned a value of 0 on both dummy codes; Hayes & Preacher, 2014). The 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect did not contain 0 for either dummy code (d1 comparing personal attributes to past actions effect estimate .71, 95% CI [.42, 1.02]; d2 comparing future actions to past actions effect estimate .49, 95% CI [.30, .72]), indicating that participants who saw postings with attribute or future action qualifications felt more deserving of the job than participants who saw postings with past action qualifications *because* they were able to report satisfying more of the qualifications.

Phase 2. To examine the unique effect of personal motivations on entitlement beliefs, we combined the data from Phase 1 participants analyzed above with that of the yoked observer participants tested in Phase 2, omitting the 12 Phase 1 participants with no yoked observer (i.e., "other"-gender or located in Australia or Ireland). We analyzed perceived deserving of the job with a 3 (condition: attributes versus future actions versus past actions) X 2 (perceiver: self versus yoked observer) mixed-design ANOVA; condition was a between-subjects factor and perceiver was a within-subjects factor, because of the matched subjects design. As predicted, there was a main effect of perceiver, $F(1, 435) = 36.81$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_{partial} = .078$; across conditions, participants felt more deserving of being hired than yoked observers judged them to be (see Figure 1). When personal motivations to justify feelings of deservingness are weaker, as is the case among the yoked observers, entitlement beliefs decrease relative to when those personal motives are present, as is the case among individuals evaluating themselves.

There was also a main effect of qualification condition, $F(2, 435) = 35.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_{partial} = .14$; entitlement beliefs were highest when job descriptions were composed of attribute qualifications, followed by future actions, followed by past actions (Figure 1), suggesting that entitlement beliefs are the result of justification processes. Phase 2 participants evaluating applicants who were able and motivated to indicate having satisfied more attribute and future action than past action qualifications judged those applicants to be more deserving of the job.

To assess awareness of the two-fold process that gives rise to entitled thinking, we returned to the mixed-design ANOVA and tested the interaction effect of qualification condition by perceiver; the interaction was not significant, $F(2, 435) = 1.29$, $p = .28$, $\eta^2_{partial} = .06$. Yoked observers did not discount the attribute and future action qualifications that individuals reported, suggesting that they were not aware that individuals could or would take advantage of the

vagueness of personal attributes and future actions to inflate personal qualifications and justify entitled beliefs.

We repeated this series of analyses on deserved annual salary (Figure 2). Again, there was a main effect of perceiver, $F(1, 437) = 17.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_{partial} = .039$, indicating that across conditions, participants felt deserving of a higher salary than yoked observers judged them to be, and supporting the hypothesis that entitlement beliefs arise in part from personal motivations to justify deservingness. There was also a main effect of qualification condition, $F(2, 437) = 5.28$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2_{partial} = .024$; entitlement beliefs were highest when job descriptions were composed of attribute qualifications, followed by future actions, followed by past actions. The simple effect of qualification condition was significant among participants themselves (as we knew from Phase 1), and among yoked observers, $F(2, 437) = 3.58$, $p = .029$. This analysis suggests again that entitlement beliefs are in part the result of the vague nature of the attributes and future actions that can be taken advantage of in the process of justifying entitled thinking.

Finally, we asked whether observers recognize and correct for the combined effect of motivated reasoning and vague qualifications on judgments of deserved pay. Like with the analysis predicting deserving of being hired, the interaction of qualification condition by perceiver on salary estimates was not significant, $F(2, 437) = 1.61$, $p = .20$, $\eta^2_{partial} = .007$. The effect of condition on deserved salary was similar regardless of whether deserved salary was judged by individuals themselves or yoked observers. Observers either do not recognize or do not correct for the fact that past actions are less amenable to motivated reasoning and therefore are perhaps a more appropriate foundation for deservingness than attributes or future actions.

One limitation of this experiment is that participants were exposed to postings comprised of only one type of qualification. Of the 170 postings we examined in the pre-study, 19 (11.2%)

included only past action qualifications, but the remainder—the majority—included qualifications of more than one type. Extending our hypotheses to postings that contain mixed qualifications, we predicted that postings that contain a higher-than-average amount of relatively vague qualifications (attributes or future actions) should heighten entitlement, whereas postings that contain a lower-than-average amount of these vague qualifications should dampen entitlement. We tested this prediction in Experiment 2.

Experiment 2

To test whether our hypotheses are supported even in postings containing a mix of qualification types, we composed three different types of postings, each containing 10 qualifications. The mean (standard deviation) proportion of qualification of each type in the postings examined in the pre-study was attributes 29% (20%), future actions 15% (16%), and past actions 51% (25%). We constructed an "average" ad that represented this distribution, and therefore included 3 attributes, 2 future actions, and 5 past actions. We also constructed a "vague" ad that included 5 attributes, 3 future actions, and 2 past actions, and a "specific" ad that included 1 attribute, 1 future action, and 8 past actions. We predicted that the vague ad, representing approximately 1 standard deviation more vague qualifications than average, would increase entitlement compared to the average, and that the specific ad, representing approximately 1 standard deviation more specific qualifications than average, would decrease entitlement. To power this test we doubled the sample size from Experiment 1-Phase 1, and pre-registered the hypotheses and analyses (e.g., Asendorpf, et al., 2013).

We took this opportunity to gain some insight into how these different postings may affect the way a candidate approaches the application process. Candidates who feel more

deserving should be more confident, and therefore be more likely to apply; we tested this by asking participants if they would apply for a job if it fit their geographical constraints.

Participants and Design

Participants were 905 adults recruited via Prolific Academic and compensated £0.80. The sample included 453 men, 449 women, and 3 "other"-gendered individuals, with ages ranging from 18 to 70 ($M = 33$ years, $SD = 10.54$), residents of the United States ($n = 433$, 48%) or United Kingdom ($n = 472$, 52%). Among those who were willing to disclose it (97%), average annual net household income fell in the range £18,501-£37,000 for participants in the United Kingdom and $25,000-$50,000 for participants in the United States. Participants were randomly assigned to respond to an average job posting ($n = 302$), the vague job posting ($n = 301$), or the specific job posting ($n = 302$). The design and analyses were pre-registered at

http://aspredicted.org/blind.php/?x=6wq6eg.

Procedure

The basic procedure was identical to Phase 1 of Experiment 1. After providing consent and indicating in which of the two countries they were located, each participant saw a job posting with 10 qualifications. For participants in the average posting condition, we randomly drew 3 qualifications drawn from the list of 463 personal attributes coded as such in in the pre-study, 2 qualifications from the list of 268 future actions, and 5 qualifications from the list of 707 past actions. For participants in the vague posting condition, the 10 randomly sampled qualifications instead included 5 attributes, 3 future actions, and 2 past action qualifications. For participants in the specific posting condition, the 10 randomly sampled qualifications included 1 attribute, 1 future action, and 8 past actions.

After marking those qualifications that they met, and being shown a message indicating how many and which of the 10 they had marked, participants responded to the same two indicators of entitlement beliefs used previously: "Do you feel you deserve a job with our company?" (1=*definitely not*, 7=*definitely yes*), and "If hired, what is the annual salary you deserve to be paid?" As an exploratory measure, they were then asked: "Assuming the job that was advertised fit any geographical constraints you have, how likely is it that you would apply for it?" (1=*extremely unlikely*, 7=*extremely likely*).

Participants then reported age, gender, and net annual household income (a list of 6 categories in the corresponding country's currency, plus the option "prefer not to disclose").

Results and Discussion

Means by condition are summarized in Table 2. As specified in the pre-registration analysis plan, we performed an ANCOVA testing differences in deservingness as a function of job posting condition, controlling for age, gender, annual household income category, and country of residence. The effect of condition was significant, $F(2, 892) = 17.33$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$. Estimated marginal mean deservingness was highest in the vague posting condition ($M = 4.58$) followed by the average posting ($M = 4.23$); deservingness was lowest in the specific posting condition ($M = 3.78$). Post-hoc tests showed that all conditions significantly differed from one another, ps $< .03$.

Next we analyzed deserved salary in a parallel analysis. Approximately 1.8% of respondents gave answers of 1200 or below which were presumably shorthand; these responses were multiplied by 1000. Responses from participants in the United Kingdom were converted to US$ using current exchange rates at xe.com (1 GB£ = 1.2415 US$). Participants felt deserving of annual salaries ranging from $0 to $1,489,752 ($M = $47,256$, $SD = 59437$). Values were log-

transformed (after adding 1) for analysis. Again, the effect of condition was significant, $F(2, 892) = 3.14$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = .007$. Participants felt deserving of the highest salary in the vague posting condition ($M = \$41,814$) followed by the average posting ($M = \$40,578$); deservingness was lowest in the specific posting condition ($M = \$35,631$). The post-hoc tests showed that the vague ad and specific ad differed, $p = .054$; the other conditions did not differ significantly.

As predicted, participants had marked the highest number of qualifications in the vague posting condition ($M = 6.38$), followed by average posting ($M = 5.59$) and specific posting ($M = 4.50$), $F(2, 902) = 62.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$. As in Phase 1 of the previous experiment we tested whether the effect of posting condition on perceived deserving of the job was mediated by the number of qualifications endorsed. As before, the 95% confidence intervals for the indirect effect did not contain 0 for either dummy code (d1 comparing the vague ad to the average ad effect estimate .28, 95% CI [.14, .43]; d2 comparing the specific ad to the average ad effect estimate -.43, 95% CI [-.57, -.30]), indicating that participants who saw postings that were more vague than average felt more deserving, and participants who saw postings that were more specific than average felt less deserving, *because* they were able to report satisfying more or less of the qualifications in the posting.

Finally, we analyzed the additional dependent variable, the likelihood of applying for the job. Responses were in line with deservingness; participants reported that they would be most likely to apply in the vague posting condition ($M = 3.77$), followed by average posting ($M = 3.49$) and specific posting ($M = 3.06$), $F(2, 892) = 10.53$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .023$. The post-hoc tests showed that the specific ad differed from the vague ad, $p < .001$ and from the average ad, $p = .02$; the average and vague ads did not differ significantly, $p = .19$. In sum, as predicted,

participants indicated they would be more likely to apply for the jobs of which they felt more deserving, which were those with average or particularly vague qualifications.

General Discussion

Job candidates tend to see themselves as more deserving to be hired and deserving of a higher salary than potential employers would say they are. This discrepancy is often referred to as a phenomenon of *entitlement*, and discussed with concern (Harvey & Dasborough, 2015; Twenge, 2006). Ironically, this research suggests that widespread recruitment practices may be contributing to the problem. By advertising vague qualifications that are open to interpretation, companies allow candidates to develop the beliefs that complicate their recruitment and retention. However, our results also suggest that these costs may go hand-in-hand with attracting a large pool of applicants and allowing applicants to feel confident about applying.

When we showed participants' self-endorsed qualifications to a group of yoked observers (Experiment 1-Phase 2), observers saw participants as more deserving to the extent that they had signaled satisfying more qualifications. Notwithstanding their different ambiguity, and given that they had been listed as the basis for recruitment, attributes and future and past actions all served as valid justification for deservingness, as suggested by Lerner's (1987) early theorizing. Some later work has distinguished outcomes based on regulations that define relevant attributes (referred to as "entitlement") from outcomes that are earned with actions (referred to as "deservingness;" Feather, 1999). Although these decisions can be differentiated—one may be deserving of a job but not entitled to it or vice versa (Feather, 2008)—without the instruction to do so, people are inclined to use both attributes and actions to evaluate deserving. It is worth noting that there was no interaction effect of ad type by perceiver (individual versus yoked

observer). Observers, on average, did not recognize that it is easier and therefore less valuable to say one has satisfied an attribute or future action qualification than a past action qualification.

One difference between our experiment and real recruitment is that unlike our yoked observers, managers and human resource professionals do not have to take candidates' word as to whether they satisfy given qualifications. Instead, these professionals usually draw their own conclusions. Devoid of personal motivation to see oneself as deserving, these observers' conclusions are unlikely to be as flattering as what individuals believe about themselves. People do not leverage the ambiguity of traits or future actions to give others the same benefit of the doubt they give themselves (Dunning et al., 1989, 1991; Helzer & Dunning, 2012; Kruger & Gilovich, 2004); observers weight the outcomes of others' actions more than their intentions (Mazzocco, Alicke, & Davis, 2004; Sezer, Zhang, Gino, & Bazerman, 2016). Managers and human resource professionals would likely not indicate that a given candidate had satisfied quite so many attribute or future action qualifications as a candidate herself would argue, because the motivation to justify the candidate's deservingness is lacking. By extension, these professionals would not necessarily conclude that applicants who self-report satisfying these qualifications are particularly deserving, unlike our yoked observers who had only the applicants' statements to rely on. On the other hand, managers who are incentivized to make a hire, or have invested effort developing an employee, might actually *be* motivated to justify a candidate's deservingness, and many prefer to use subjective measures for selection (Highhouse, 2008). When evaluations are being conducted by similarly-motivated evaluators, clear specific past action qualifications might help mitigate judgmental biases.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

Strengths of this research include the use of real job postings as stimuli and a relatively large (total $N = 1777$) sample of participants in the two experiments. Notably, this sample was also relatively diverse, comprising both young and older adults in four countries, with a range of incomes. These participants facilitate generalizing to the global worker pool (Landers & Behrend, 2015). More generally, our experiments complement previous research on entitlement, much of which has focused on individual differences. It is clearly important to know how to identify the employees who are chronically high in entitlement, and how they came to be that way. However, it is also useful for companies to be able to design managerial practices like recruitment in ways that restrain employees' entitlement beliefs, in addition to or instead of trying to identify and avoid hiring highly entitled individuals.

In building on this work, researchers might take as a starting point the observation that differences in rated specificity of these categories of qualifications are averages; not all attributes and future actions are more vague than all past actions. Future research could examine, for instance, whether there are systematic ways to make attribute qualifications more specific, and if so, whether doing this dampens entitlement beliefs. Recruiters might also carefully consider whether other ways of categorizing qualifications, such as into Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs), reveals systematic variation in vagueness (i.e., "abilities" may be more open to interpretation than observable skills) and if so, whether it would be advisable to add or remove some of these qualifications from postings.

The present research is limited by the fact that participants viewed job ads only hypothetically; although they are working and may be looking for a new job, they were not real applicants. However, we suspect that our results would only be stronger with real applicants. The motivation to secure a job and high salary is stronger in responding to real as opposed to

hypothetical postings, so workers are likely to deploy motivated reasoning more intensely to the extent that they are able. Real applicants and workers are thus likely to inflate their reports about satisfying attribute and future action qualifications even more than our participants did. Whereas these types of qualifications allow entitlement beliefs to emerge, people have relatively little flexibility in claiming they performed a particular behaviour in the past if they did not (Dunning et al., 1989), restraining the development of entitlement beliefs. Testing these hypotheses with current employees by modifying the job descriptions for those undergoing review, for instance, would be another promising future direction.

Practical Implications

Our experiments suggest that when job postings are composed of past actions more so than attributes or future actions, people will on average see themselves as less deserving. Companies wishing to restrain entitlement in applicants could advertise a higher proportion of past action qualifications. This is likely to produce applicants with lower salary expectations, and perhaps reduce problematic behavior linked to entitlement (see Fisk, 2010). On the other hand, the results of Experiment 2 suggest that this benefit to companies comes at the expense of attracting fewer candidates. Those companies wishing to attract the largest pool of applicants might decide, instead, to advertise a higher proportion of attribute or future action qualifications; recognizing that such postings inflate entitlement beliefs, these companies should be prepared to take other action (e.g. stating the salary range on offer directly).

It is worth considering the implications for applicants as well as companies. Applicants who see postings with a high proportion of relatively vague qualifications are not only more likely to apply, they may interview with confidence and be likely to land the position. Indeed, those who feel entitled to a high salary may negotiate vigorously and end up relatively highly

paid. However, in the interest of understanding an employer's perspective, applicants and employees might find it useful to ask managers to identify the specific actions that make one deserving of hiring, promotion, or other desirable outcomes. Because these qualifications are less amenable to motivated reasoning, relying on them may facilitate agreement about entitlement.

Conclusion

Whereas most previous research has focused on pervasive individual differences in entitlement beliefs, this research picks up on one potentially causal factor whereby situations contribute to these beliefs, which managers find problematic. Entitlement beliefs entail both personal motivations to see oneself as deserving and the ability to justify those motivated judgments. Accordingly, people feel more deserving when qualifications for a job are vague and thus amenable to motivated reasoning.

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Table 1

Examples of qualification types as coded in pre-study

Personal attribute	Future action	Past action
You have a strong work ethic	Ability to analyze financial reports	Associate's degree preferred
Strong analytical and problem solving skills	Acquire 20 hours of continuing education every two years	Candidate will have PR experience
Excellent organizational, analytical and problem solving skills	Must obtain and maintain a security clearance throughout the course of employment	Experience in cleaning or custodian work is helpful but may not always be required
Sensitivity to culturally diverse subject matter and work environment	Must be willing to work a flexible schedule based on business needs; including evening, weekends and holidays	Experience creating and maintaining technical documentation, test plans and implementation plans
Ability to define problems, collects data, establish facts, and draw valid conclusions	Provides administrative support to business operations by performing processing tasks such as data entry, scanning, mail sorting or similar activities	Proficient use of technology; including, Microsoft Word, Excel, e-mail, Web-enabled applications, and database software

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for measures of entitlement beliefs in Experiment 1 and Experiment 2

	Deservingness M (SD)	Deserved salary M (SD)	r (r with ln salary)
Experiment 1 – Phase 1 (participants)	4.84 (1.56)	$34,630 (29457)	.13** (.26***)
Attributes condition (n = 149)	5.46 (1.27)	$36,017 (33597)	
Future actions condition (n = 151)	4.85 (1.54)	$37,482 (36184)	
Past actions condition (n = 152)	4.23 (1.59)	$30,436 (12530)	
Experiment 1 – Phase 2 (yoked observers)	4.25 (1.52)	$34,302 (17816)	.35*** (.24***)
Attributes condition (n = 143)	4.68 (1.56)	$37,661 (20497)	
Future actions condition (n = 147)	4.34 (1.52)	$33,861 (17757)	
Past actions condition (n = 150)	3.77 (1.36)	$31,533 (14392)	.
Experiment 2	4.48 (1.70)	$47,256 (59437)	.09** (.42***)
Vague posting condition (n = 301)	4.86 (1.61)	$45,337 (24600)	
Average posting condition (n = 302)	4.51 (1.67)	$51,294 (93101)	
Specific posting condition (n = 302)	4.07 (1.73)	$45,132 (59437)	

Note. In Experiment 1 – Phase 1, one participant in the attributes condition and one participant in the future actions condition did not respond to the measure of deservingness. Comparisons between conditions within Experiment 1—Phase 1 test H1 and H2; comparisons between Phase 1 and Phase 2 in Experiment 1 test H3. Salary values were log-transformed for analysis in both Experiments. ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.
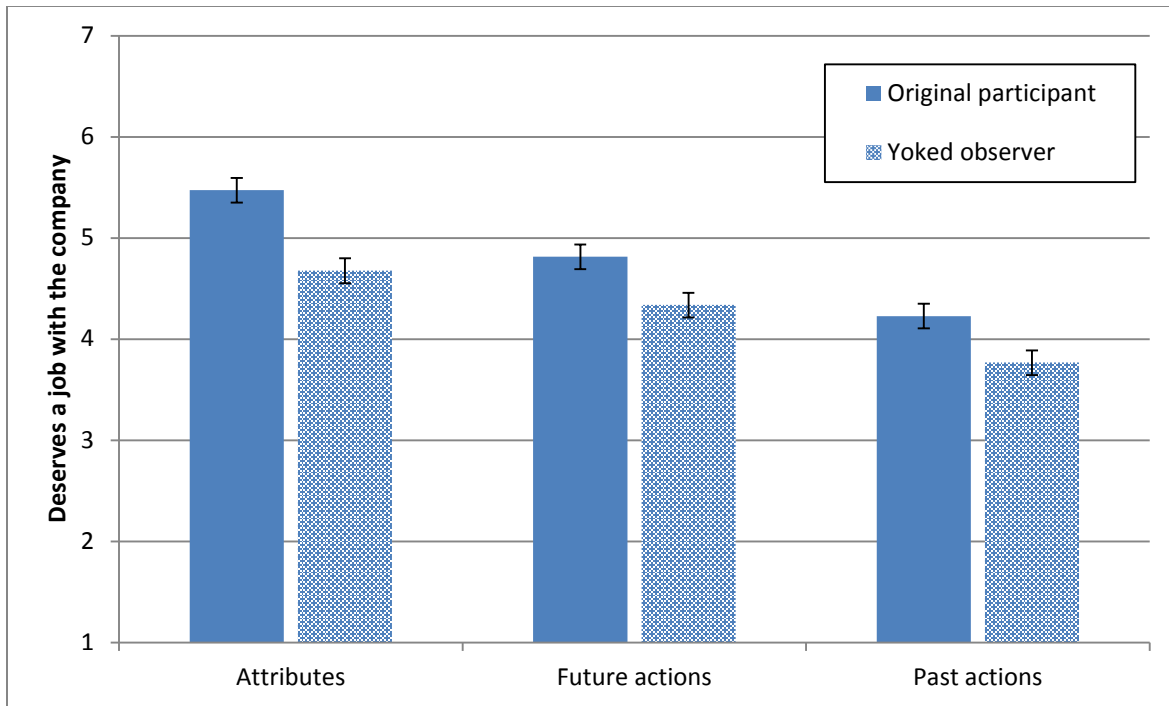
Figure 1. In Experiment 1, perceived deserving of job as judged by individuals themselves and by gender- and country-yoked observers (i.e. Phase 1 and Phase 2), as a function of the type of qualifications in a job posting to which the individual responded. Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.
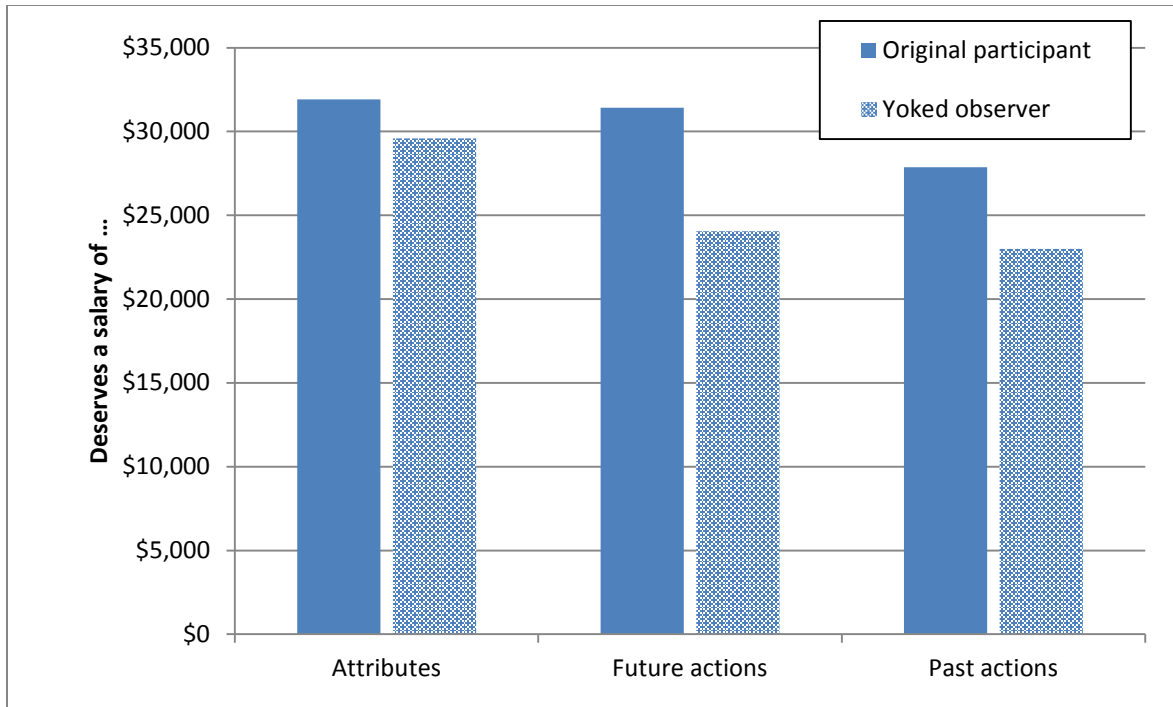
Figure 2. In Experiment 1, perceived annual salary deserved, as judged by individuals themselves and by gender- and country-yoked observers (i.e. Phase 1 and Phase 2), as a function of the type of qualifications in a job posting to which the individual responded. Salary analyses were conducted on logged values but transformed predictions are depicted here.