Priming Jobs as Skill Development Opportunities and Responses to Job Postings

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Abstract

Many inexperienced job seekers adopt a focused job search strategy in which they disregard job postings that seem unrelated to their interests. Yet, many of the jobs that they disregard during their job search could have been relevant to such interests because they offer opportunities for skill development. Counterintuitively, an exploratory job search can help such job seekers find and pursue more relevant jobs. In an experiment (N = 122), we examined the effect of priming seemingly irrelevant jobs as skill development opportunities on inexperienced job seekers' responses to job postings. Compared to those who did not receive the prime, those who received the prime reported higher perceived job relevance and, in turn, perceived job attractiveness for subsequently viewed job postings. The results suggest that career educators could use peer-to-peer learning, or public reflection, to encourage students to share insights with each other, reframe the meanings of job relevance, and pursue more relevant jobs.

Keywords: AHSS, priming theory, person-job fit, experiment, perceived job relevance, job attractiveness

Many post-secondary education students become job seekers near the end of their first academic year. When they embark on their job search, they adopt a job search strategy, a way of finding and pursuing job opportunities (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005). Most inexperienced job seekers rely on a focused job search strategy, one in which they think about their career interests and try to find jobs that match those interests (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Fang & Saks, 2021). Those who use this strategy aim to short-list jobs that seem highly relevant to their interests and disregard jobs that seem unrelated to such interests.

Intuitively, this job search strategy seems helpful for securing a desirable job. However, research suggests that adopting a narrow view on which jobs are relevant to one's interests at such an early stage in one's career might inadvertently lead inexperienced job seekers to overlook desirable jobs. Some jobs that may appear unrelated to one's interests during a job search may later become relevant (Drewery & Pretti, 2021). And, as the job becomes more relevant to the individual, it also becomes more satisfying (Hur et al., 2019). Yet, few job postings provide enough evidence for job seekers to understand how the job may be relevant to them (Drewery et al., 2022).

Consequently, it may be useful to encourage inexperienced student job seekers to adopt a more open-minded job search strategy, one that is less dismissive of jobs that seem unrelated to one's interests. Such a strategy has been called an exploratory job search strategy (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005). It involves pursuing a wide array of jobs, even those that may not initially seem linked with one's interests. Greater use of an exploratory job search strategy can result in more job offers (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Koen et al., 2010) and greater job quality (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2022). This suggests that pursuing jobs that seem unrelated to one's interests may help job seekers stumble upon excellent opportunities that they may have otherwise overlooked.

While previous research demonstrates the importance of an exploratory job search strategy to desirable job search outcomes, it offers little insight regarding how career education might encourage inexperienced student job seekers to "keep an open mind" during their job search. In response, this paper seeks to understand how career education might help students pursue jobs for which they are qualified and that may become

relevant to their interests but that are typically overlooked. Drawing from priming theory (Bargh, 2016) and the importance of skill development to perceptions of job relevance (Drewery & Pretti, 2021; Nevison et al., 2017), we designed an experiment to test the proposition that reminding job seekers that jobs which seem unrelated to one's interests may become relevant to them because they offer opportunities for skill development will enhance perceived job relevance and job pursuit intentions for subsequently viewed job postings.

Perceived Job Relevance and Job Pursuit

Perceived job relevance is the extent to which an individual perceives that a given job is relevant to their interests, such as the careers to which they aspire (Nevison et al., 2017). The closer the match between a given job and the characteristics of a job to which one aspires, the more relevant that job (Larkin et al., 2007). Perceptions of job relevance are linked with the quality of a given job. It is positively associated with job satisfaction (Hur et al., 2019), work engagement (Drewery et al., 2016), sense of meaning in one's work (Nevison et al., 2017), and intention to remain in one's job (Ju & Li, 2019). Such associations may be explained by person-job fit theory (O'Reilly et al., 1991) which proposes that the greater the match between one's interests and their job, the more positive their work experience.

Given these previous findings, it is not surprising that perceptions of job relevance influence job seekers' job pursuit. The greater the fit between one's interests and their expectation of a given job, the more likely they are to pursue that job (Chapman et al., 2005). Relatedly, when job postings suggest an experience that is more aligned with job seekers' interests, such job seekers report greater willingness to put forth their best effort during a job application (Drewery et al., 2022). This is consistent with research that shows job seekers are more interested in jobs that are aligned with their career aspirations than those which are not (Cunningham et al., 2005; Petry et al., 2021). These findings suggest that job seekers are most attracted to jobs that they perceived to be highly relevant to their interests.

Although most job seekers seem motivated to find a job that is relevant to their interests, many end up in a job that they report is unrelated to their interests (Larkin et al., 2007). This is concerning because the greater the gap between one's job characteristics and career aspirations, the lower their work motivation over time (Muldoon et al., 1995), a sign of a poor work experience. This may have negative implications for individuals' well-being and career success over a longer term. We suspect that this gap is due in part to the job search strategies enacted by inexperienced job seekers. Some may use strategies that inadvertently remove high-quality jobs from the list of jobs to which they might apply.

Perceived Job Relevance During the Job Search

The job search is the process through which job seekers identify job opportunities and make decisions about ones to which they will apply (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005). When done right, it is a self-regulatory process in which individuals set goals and direct behaviours to achieve such goals (Wanberg et al., 2020). Such goal-directed behaviour has been described in terms of job search strategies (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005). There are two such strategies that fall under a self-regulatory framework: focused and exploratory. A focused job search strategy involves identifying and pursuing jobs that match one's specific interests. An exploratory job search strategy involves pursuing a wide array of jobs that may not meet such interests.

Most inexperienced student job seekers use a focused job search strategy more often than they use an exploratory one (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Fang & Saks, 2021). Intuitively, this should result in a greater chance of ended ending up in a job that is relevant to one's interests. Surprisingly, the opposite is often true (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2022). An exploratory job search strategy "casts a wider net" on the job opportunities available in the labour market. Some such opportunities may offer an experience that is highly relevant to the

job seeker but that may not appear that way during the job search. As such, those who use a focused job search strategy may mistakenly overlook jobs that, unbeknownst to them, could be highly relevant to their interests.

Our interest in this paper was to understand how career education might address this problem. Given that the job search strategy involves self-regulation, it seems that job search strategies are malleable. Yet, previous research has focused mostly on socio-demographic variables (Fang & Saks, 2021) or labour market conditions (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2022) that influence job search strategies. We do not yet understand how to encourage job seekers to adopt an exploratory job search strategy, one that seems counterintuitive. We argue that one approach career educators may take to address this is to introduce the notion that some jobs that seem irrelevant to one's interests may actually be relevant learning opportunities. We explore this argument in the following section through the lens of priming theory.

Priming Jobs as Skill Development Opportunities

In interviews with students who had completed work-integrated learning experiences, Drewery and Pretti (2021) found that students' perceptions of job relevance evolved throughout their work experience. Some students worked in organizations or industries that seemed unrelated to their academic programs and career

aspirations. Yet, as the experience progressed, they realized that the job was more personally relevant that once thought. Skill development seemed central to this evolving perspective. When students who worked in seemingly irrelevant jobs developed new skills, they perceived that the job advanced them toward their career aspirations. This study suggests that opportunities for skill development may help to transform low job relevance into high job relevance.

This insight also suggests that evidence of learning opportunities providing in job postings could influence job seekers' perceptions of job relevance and, ultimately, their job pursuit plans. Unfortunately, most job postings provide limited evidence of such learning opportunities (Moore & Khan, 2020). Many jobs offer individuals opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Yet, such opportunities are not mentioned in recruitment materials. For job seekers, especially inexperienced ones, the challenge then is to develop a sense of how the job offers opportunities for learning based on very little (if any) helpful information. Consequently, many job seekers seem likely to overlook jobs whose postings do a poor job of communicating opportunities for learning.

Priming theory suggests that job seekers could be encouraged to look beyond the job positing posting, to think of jobs as opportunities for skill development, and that this could influence their assessments of subsequent-

ly viewed job postings. Priming refers to a process through which a concept becomes salient and, because of such salience, influences responses to one's environment (Bargh, 2016). More specifically, priming typically involves the administration of instruction, either explicitly or implicitly, to think or feel a certain way about something. The instruction then facilitates some action. In a classic example, participants who received subtle cues (i.e., implicit instructions) related to the concept of old age walked slower than those for whom the concept was not primed (Bargh et al., 1996, Experiment 2).

There is already some evidence that job seekers' responses to job postings can be subject to their receipt of primes. Walker et al. (2011) found that the presence of technologically advanced website features primed inexperienced job seekers to think of organizations as more innovative. Similarly, depictions of racial diversity primed job seekers to think of organizations as more stylish. The presence of visual cues acted as primes that were assimilated into subsequently assessments of the organization. The prime was associated with such assessments in a way that saw a greater reflection of the prime in how participants viewed the organization.

This study provides initial support for the notion that inexperienced job seekers' responses to job advertisements can be primed. As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, our interest was in understanding whether such job seekers could be primed to pur-

sue jobs that might initially seem unrelated to their interests but that could offer excellent experiences. Consistent with this priming theory perspective, and given the role of skill development in perceptions of job relevance (Drewery & Pretti, 2021), we expect that those who are primed to think of jobs as opportunities for skill development may perceive job postings to be more relevant than those who are not primed. That is, job seekers primed to think about jobs as opportunities for skill development may report subsequently viewed job postings to be more personally relevant even if those job postings provide little evidence of development opportunities. This is reflected in our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: priming inexperienced job seekers to think of jobs as skill development opportunities will encourage such seekers to report greater perceived job relevance for subsequently viewed job postings.

Similarly, given the link between perceived job relevance and job attractiveness (Drewery et al., 2022; Chapman et al., 2005), we expect that those who are primed to think of jobs as opportunities for skill development may perceive job postings to be more attractive than those who are not primed. Job seekers primed to think about the skill development opportunities within seemingly irrelevant jobs may be more attracted to subsequently viewed jobs. Perceptions of job relevance may also mediate this difference

such that the prime influences perceptions of job attractiveness because it enhances perceptions of job relevance. Below, we offer two hypotheses related to this.

Hypothesis 2a: priming inexperienced job seekers to think of jobs as skill development opportunities will encourage such seekers to report greater job attractiveness for subsequently viewed job postings.

Hypothesis 2b: perceived job relevance will mediate an indirect positive association between receipt of the prime and job attractiveness.

Method

Design

Our aim was to examine the effect of priming jobs as skill development opportunities on inexperienced job seekers' responses to subsequently viewed job postings. We designed a between-subjects experiment to achieve that aim. Participants were randomly assigned to a no prime condition or a prime condition. We then measured responses to job postings.

Participants

Participants ($n = 122$) were undergraduate students enrolled in their second academic term in arts, humanities, and social sciences (AHSS) programs (e.g., psychology, sociology, history, economics, dramatic and fine arts, English)

at a Canadian university[1]. Such students were of interest for two reasons. First, these students were of interest for their involvement in the job search process. At the time of the study, many of these participants were likely in the process of searching for a summer job. Second, the link between AHSS programs and job opportunities is ambiguous (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2022). Such ambiguity leads to job search strategies that are not helpful to finding a relevant job (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2022). Thus, AHSS students may be most at-risk of overlooking jobs that would be relevant to their interests. On average, participants were 18.5 years old ($SD = .82$), and the majority (77.6%) were female.

Procedure

Following approval from an institutional ethics review board, participants were recruited to a web-based study through their university email. After providing informed consent, participants were asked to complete three tasks. The

[1] Participants were from the following academic programs: Anthropology (n = 1), Economics (n = 20), English (n = 6), Fine Arts (n = 2), French (n = 2), Global Business and Digital Art (n = 12), History (n = 2), Liberal Studies (n = 2), Music (n = 1), Psychology (n = 43), Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Studies (n = 1), Social Development Studies (n = 21), Sociology (n = 4), Speech Communication (n = 3), Theatre and Performance (n = 1)

first task was to complete a demographic questionnaire. This was used to characterize the sample. The second task was to read and respond to a written text. This text was an opportunity to prime the notion of jobs as skill development opportunities. The third task was to read and respond to six job postings. After each job posting, participants were asked to report their perceptions of job relevance and job attractiveness. They were also asked to provide a brief written explanation for their reports of perceived job relevance, but these are not included in this article. After completing these measures, participants were debriefed about the purpose of the study. All participants were offered nominal remuneration for their time.

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Participants were instructed that a goal of the study was to understand whether written reflections are indicators of students' experiential learning outcomes. They were asked to read such a reflection and report the extent to which it was relevant to its author's learning outcomes. Specifically, they were asked to rate how relevant the reflection was to the development of job-related skills. Unbeknownst to participants, the written reflections were fabricated. They served as an opportunity to introduce the prime.

The prime was a written message attributed to a senior peer named Sam. Sam was tethered to participants' own program. For

example, if the participant had reported on the demographic questionnaire that they were a psychology student, then Sam was a psychology student in the final year of that academic program. This was important to positioning Sam as an influential peer whose experience could be relevant to participants' own job search processes. The decision to introduce the prime through a peer's reflection was informed by the literature on social influences during the job search. Job seekers frequently share experiences and seek out advice on the job search from each other (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009). Students, especially, seem likely to connect with each other to discuss jobs and job search strategies. Such connection can influence attitudes toward a given job (Lent et al., 2000; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007, 2009).

There were two versions of the reflection[2] (see Table 1). The version that participants received depended on the condition to which they were randomly assigned. Those in the no-prime condition received a version that about Sam's academic program. This was meant to be entirely unrelated to the core concept of the prime, which again was that some

[2] As part of a larger study, there was a third condition. That condition involved a message about career development. It was atheoretical and exploratory analyses suggest that it has no effect on outcomes in the experiment relative to the control condition. We excluded this from the present article but mention it here for the sake of transparency.

jobs that seem unrelated to one's academic program might later become relevant because of skill development opportunities. In the prime condition, the written reflection suggested that jobs that first seem unrelated to one's academic training and career aspirations can become relevant through the application and development of skills (Drewery & Pretti, 2021).

Job Postings

Consistent with previous research on response to job postings (Jones et al., 2006), we crafted six postings. Each contained the same categories of information: job title, organization name and information, job responsibilities, and recommended skills (see Table 2). The content was borrowed from job postings that had been filled by AHSS students at participants' university. We selected content that seemed somewhat ambiguous so that perceptions of job relevance would vary. We also selected somewhat junior-level jobs with required skills that were appropriate for these participants. This suggested that participants were reasonably qualified for such jobs. The required skills were mostly consistent across job postings, but each one contained something unique (see Table 3) to simulate a more realistic job search. Participants were instructed to imagine that the pay and location for each job was desirable and equal across jobs. This instruction was meant to control for the possible effects of pay and location on job

Table 1

Content of Written Reflections by Condition

No Prime Condition	Prime Condition
In my first year, I wasn't sure what major to choose but I really enjoyed the variety of courses I was able to take. As it turns out, I talked to students in upper years and TAs from different majors and they were really enthusiastic about chatting with me and helping me to discover what I was most passionate about. Looking back, I'm really glad that I reached out to others because it helped me to develop a better idea of what I want to do and I'm really happy with my choice of major.	For my first co-op job I worked as a Guest Service Assistant for Brydson Group Ltd. At first, it seemed totally unrelated to my program, but I was just happy to have a job. As it turns out, I was able to develop my problem-solving skills, and took the initiative to do an extra project where I was able to apply some concepts I had learned in class. Looking back, I realize that it was relevant because I developed a lot of skills that have helped me to be successful with my subsequent co-op jobs. I learned that some jobs might seem unrelated to my program but still offer a great opportunity to develop useful skills.

Note: Co-op (co-operative education) is a form of work-integrated learning in which students alternate between academic terms and paid work terms. All students who participated in this study were familiar with co-op because the University they attended had a large co-op program.

Table 2

Example Job Posting

Job title	Research Analyst
Organization	University International Department
Organization Info	• Supports a university's internationalization activities and goals and leads innovative international projects. • Organizes and manages international agreements, delegation visits and briefs, and safety abroad
Job Responsibilities	• Generate research reports to support the work of the University International Department in the areas of internationalization of higher education, strategic partnerships, and mapping of a university's international activities • Prepare agenda updates and briefings as well as provide support during delegation visits
Recommended Skills	• Strong research and information management skills • Strong verbal and written communication • Ability to learn quickly and work under tight timelines • Ability to work independently and in teams

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Table 3

Skills Included in the Recommended Skills Section of Each Job Posting

Skills	Job Postings					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Common Skills						
Communication	X	X	X	X	X	X
Attention to detail/organizational skills	X	X	X	--	X	X
Ability to work independently and/or with others	X	--	X	X	--	X
Ability to learn	--	X	--	X	X	--
Specific Skills						
Ability to meet deadlines	X	--	--	--	X	--
Social media skills	--	X	--	--	--	--
Customer service skills	--	--	X	--	--	--
Research skills	--	--	--	X	--	--
Problem solving skills	--	--	--	--	--	X

Note: X indicates that the skill was included in the recommended skills section of that job positing

attractiveness (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

Measures

Manipulation Check

After reading the written passage, participants were asked to report on the relevance of the message to the message author's skills ("How relevant is Sam's experience to developing their job-related skills?"). Responses were provided on a seven-point scale anchored with 1 = "Not at all relevant" and 7 = "Completely relevant."

Perceived Job Relevance

For each job posting, participants were asked "How relevant is this job to you?" Responses were provided on 10-point scales anchored with 1 = "Not relevant at all" and 10 = "Completely relevant." A perceived job relevance score was obtained by averaging the response to all six job postings.

Perceived Job Attractiveness

Perceived job attractiveness was operationalized as intentions to apply for the job (Chapman et al., 2005). For each job posting, participants were asked "Would you apply to this job?" Responses were provided on seven-point scales anchored with 1 = "Definitely not" and 7 = "Definitely yes". A perceived job attractiveness score was obtained by averaging the response to all six job postings.

Results

Preliminary Data Checks

Two preliminary data checks were performed prior to the main analyses. First, the data were checked for random assignment. As expected, an independent samples t-test showed that there was no significant difference in participants' age between the no prime condition ($M = 18.38$, $SD = .66$) and the prime condition ($M = 18.56$, $SD = .92$), $t(119) = 1.19$, $p = .24$. Similarly, an independent samples t-test showed that there was no significant difference in the proportion of females to males between the no prime condition ($M = .74$, $SD = .44$) and prime condition ($M = .77$, $SD = .43$), $t(119) = .37$, $p = .72$.

Second, the data were checked for efficacy of the skill

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development prime message. It was expected that perceived relevance of the message to the message author's skill development would be higher in the prime condition than in the no prime condition. As expected, an independent sample t-test showed that perceived relevance of the message to the message author's skill development was higher in the prime condition ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 1.25$) than in the no prime condition ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 1.76$), $t(120) = 4.92$, $p < .001$, $d = .84$, 95% CI [.52, 1.26].

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 stated that priming inexperienced job seekers to think of jobs as skill development opportunities will encourage

such seekers to report greater perceived job relevance for subsequently viewed job postings. This was tested with an independent samples t-test. The results of that test showed that perceived job relevance was higher in the prime condition ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 1.57$) than in the no prime condition ($M = 5.01$, $SD = 1.38$), $t(120) = 2.64$, $p = .009$, $d = .48$, 95% CI [.12, .84]. These findings support Hypothesis 1. Figure 1 illustrates the result.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2a stated that priming inexperienced job seekers to think of jobs as skill development opportunities will encourage such seekers to report greater job attractiveness for subsequently viewed

job postings. This was tested with an independent samples t-test. The results of that test showed that perceived job attractiveness was not significantly different between the prime condition ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 1.01$) and the no prime condition ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.08$), $t(120) = 1.45$, $p = .15$, $d = .26$, 95% CI [-10, .62]. Thus, Hypothesis 2a was rejected.

Hypothesis 2b stated that perceived job relevance will mediate an indirect positive association between receipt of the prime and job attractiveness. This was tested with a conditional process analysis using the SPSS PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017; Model 4 with 5,000 bootstrapped samples). The study conditions were coded such that $0 =$ no prime condition and $1 =$ prime condition. Perceived job rel-

Figure 1

Illustration of Significant Difference in Perceived Job Relevance Between No Treatment and Treatment Conditions
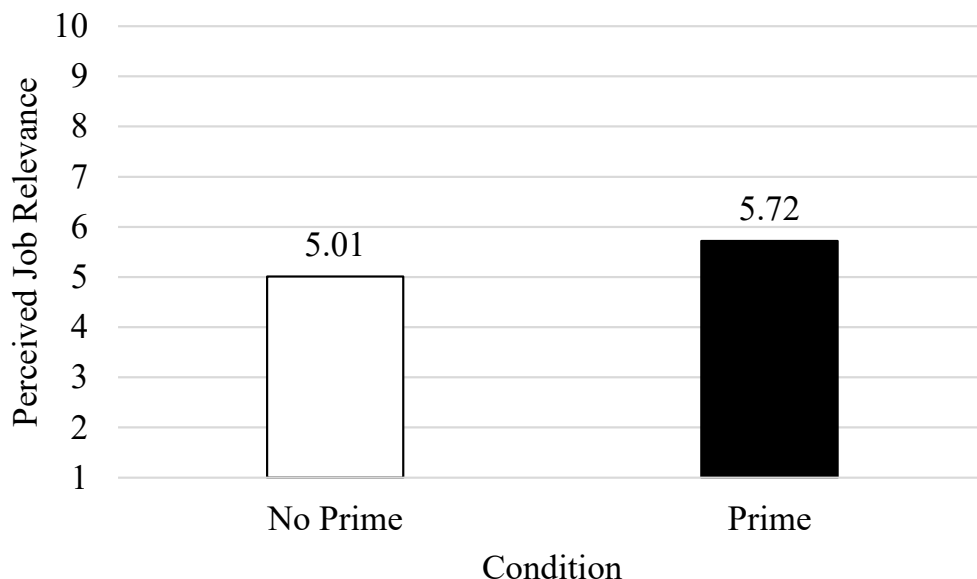
evance was specified as a mediator of the relationship between study condition and perceived job attractiveness. The analysis showed that study condition was positively and indirectly associated with job attractiveness through perceived job relevance. Those who received the prime reported greater perceived job relevance, and, in turn, perceived job relevance was positively associated with perceived job attractiveness. Study condition was not directly associated with job attractiveness. This suggests an indirect-only association between the prime and job attractiveness (Zhao et al., 2010). These findings support Hypothesis 2a. Figure 2 illustrates the results.

Discussion

When post-secondary students become job seekers, most adopt a focused job search strategy in which they disregard job postings that seem unrelated to their specific interests. Yet, some jobs that are disregarded might have become relevant due to skill development opportunities present in most jobs. Although it is counterintuitive, adopting an exploratory strategy may result in greater likelihood of securing a job that matches such interests. Previous research had demonstrated the importance of an exploratory job search strategy during the job search but had not examined career education interventions that encourage students to "keep an open mind" during the job search. The present study examined and found support for one such intervention based on priming the concept of jobs as skill development opportunities.

The data seem to support previous findings that most inexperienced job seekers are likely to adopt a focused job search strategy in which they are likely to disregard job postings that seem unrelated to their specific interests (Crossley & Highhouse, 2005; Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2022; Fang & Saks, 2021). Participants in the no prime condition reported middling perceptions of job relevance and job attractiveness. These participants were from AHSS programs, whose link with various job opportunities is often ambiguous (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2022). We presented them with job postings that were not clearly relevant to their academic programs. Not surprisingly, many were unsure about how these jobs were relevant to them, and they indicated that they would be only somewhat likely to pursue them in a job search.

Responses to the job postings were different for those who were primed to think about such postings as opportunities for skill development. Participants who read a reflection ostensibly writ-

Figure 2

Illustration of the Direct and Indirect Associations Between Study Condition, Perceived Job Relevance, and Perceived Job Attractiveness (n = 122).
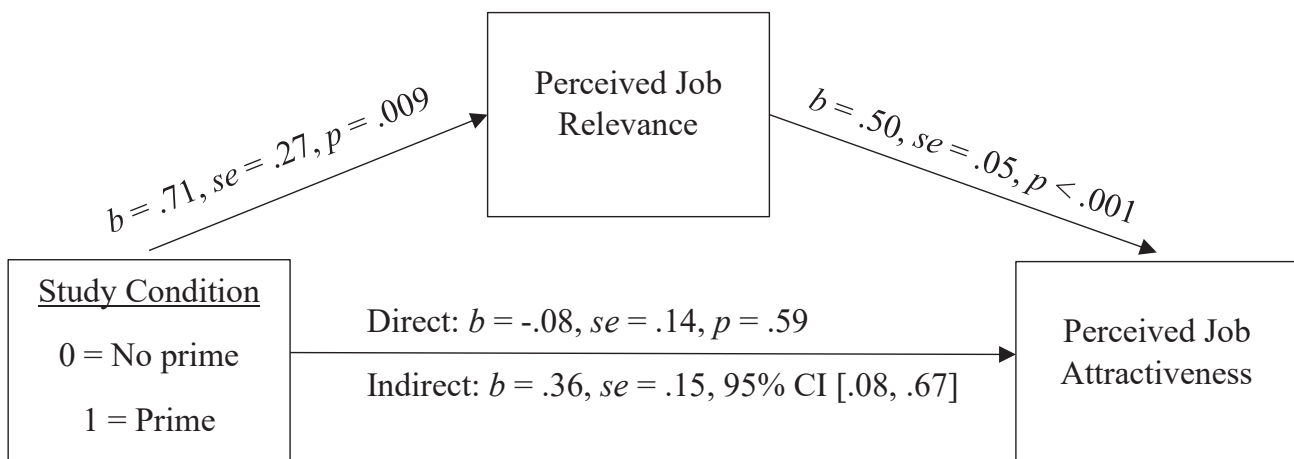
ten by their peer about the ways in which jobs became relevant through skill development reported greater perceived job relevant for subsequently viewed job postings. This is consistent with the literature on social influences during the job search. When job seekers are exposed to insights shared by close others, their subsequent reactions to recruitment materials become informed by those insights (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007, 2009). This is also consistent with the view that peers influence how job seekers identify and make career choices (Krumboltz et al., 1990; Lent et al., 2000). Further, it confirms that responses to job postings are malleable and subject to priming intervention (Walker et al., 2011).

In addition, this result supports our expectation that skill development opportunities are central to perceptions of job relevance. Consistent with the literature (Drewery & Pretti, 2021), we found that assessing jobs for their potential as learning opportunities rendered those jobs more relevant. Even for these students who were otherwise unsure about the relevance of the jobs they reviewed, focusing on opportunities for developing skills encouraged a more open-minded or exploratory job search strategy. More specifically, the data indicate that those who received the skill development prime would be less likely to discard job postings just because such postings did not seem related to one's interests.

The results also support the expected link between perceived job relevance and perceived job attractiveness. On average, the more relevant the jobs were perceived the stronger the intention to apply to such jobs. This is consistent with person-job fit theory (O'Reilly et al., 1991) which predicted that job seekers would be more attracted to jobs that they perceived to be personally relevant. It is also consistent with previous research which suggests the importance of relevance to a more positive work experience (e.g., Nevison et al., 2017). The present study extends such earlier research into the job search. It suggests that perceptions of job relevance developed during the job search may have implications for individuals' job search strategies.

Implications for Career Education

The findings presented in this paper may have practical implications for career educators. As previous research suggests, the challenge for such educators is to encourage inexperienced job seekers not to adopt too narrow a view on which jobs are more relevant and which are less so. One way to meet this challenge is to introduce notions of jobs—even those that seem unrelated to one's interests—as skill development opportunities. In many cases, jobs offer skill development opportunities that are not advertised in a job posting (Moore & Khan, 2020). Reminding job seekers of this may help lead to a more exploratory job search strategy that short lists desirable jobs.

In this study, we introduced or "primed" this notion in the form of a peer's written reflection. This may suggest an opportunity for career educators to leverage peer relationships toward more effective job search strategies. Career educators have long understood that the job search is socially constructed. What students think they know about their job or career preferences is situated in social context and influenced by social interaction (Gibson, 2004). Peers can influence job search dynamics in several ways (Parker et al., 2008). Building from this perspective, educators could encourage students to share insights with each other to reframe the meanings of job relevance. They can help each other think more critically about what a relevant job looks like during such an early stage in their career, which could lead to better job search outcomes.

In practice, this peer-to-peer learning could take the form of what Attard (2012) called public reflection. Public reflection is the practice of unpacking experiences in a social context. In this case, it refers to sense-making about previous work opportunities. When public reflection about such opportunities takes places in a social context, more senior individuals may become role models. They could remind less experienced job seekers that jobs that seem unrelated to their education or career aspirations are opportunities to apply and develop skills they are they building toward.

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Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The generalizability of the results presented here are limited to components of the experimental design. Perhaps most important, results were dependent on the reflections that we crafted for the study. As mentioned, we took several steps to create written reflections that were plausibly written by participants' peers. Yet, such reflections were presented in the context of a study. Participants' responses were not private which may limit the generalizability of the results to real-world employment settings. To address this limitation, future research might rely on a field experiment or secondary data to extend the present results. For example, social media sites such as *Glassdoor* provide a space in which individuals post reviews of various jobs. Typically, such reviews are focused on working conditions, such as the quality of pay and management. It may be possible to embed messages from others and examine the effect of such messages on job seekers' application behaviours.

Also, the study was limited to the specific job postings that were presented to participants. Based on our knowledge of students' jobs at this institution, we knew that the job postings included in this study were reasonably relevant to AHSS education. We note, however, that all six job postings included in the study were quite ordinary, and some may have had a dubious connection to students' academic training.

They featured job titles such as "Research Analyst" and "Supply and Helpdesk Assistant." Current trends in the labour market suggest a proliferation of new roles. For example, we observe that many organizations now have people in roles such as "Director of Future of Work." The relationships between AHSS students' education, career aspirations, and such roles seems highly ambiguous. Thus, it would be useful to replicate the present study with job postings that are even more representative of emergent trends in the labour market. This could be useful both to career educators and organizational recruiters.

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