

# Job Interview Communication Behaviors of Graduating Seniors

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated job interview communication behaviors of graduating seniors. For the first time ever, it is possible to have four generations of people working together (Thompson, 2011). Previous research needs to be updated with these generational gaps taken into consideration. Information was gathered qualitatively from recruiters regarding appropriate communication behaviors. Perceptions of the workforce are provided by socialization sources. This study attempted to reveal if these socialization sources provided accurate or inaccurate information about the workforce. Analysis and data revealed that expectancy violations are related to graduating senior's behaviors being deemed as inappropriate and thus the candidate is not hired. These results support the usefulness of expectancy violations theory as an explanation for hiring other generations more often. Multigenerational issues are also present in the study as a possible reason for candidates' behaviors being deemed as inappropriate.

## INTRODUCTION

Today, it is possible to have four different generations working together in an organization. People in their 70s are working alongside people in their teens. With each generation having a different set of values and attitudes, the younger generations can experience difficulty communicating effectively with other generations without having worked with or have an understanding of them. The current oldest generation in the workforce is known as the veterans. Thompson (2011) stated that this generation is known as the "silent generation" out of respect for authority. The next oldest is the Baby Boomers who are known to be very hard workers with a "whatever it takes" attitude. Next is Generation X, which focuses on juggling work and life. Finally, is the generation being studied, Generation Y or the Millennials. This generation prefers flexibility. For Millennials entering the workforce, communication with other generations is instrumental in finding a job, thus is it extremely important that they learn to communicate successfully with other generations.

Goudreau (2012) stated that managers in charge of hiring are three times more likely to hire someone 50 years or older instead of a young adult because young adults need significant improvement on their interviewing skills. As Hoffner, Levine, and Toohey (2008) stated, "the work environment is one of the most important contexts in which individuals function during their lives" (p. 282). Because the work environment is such a big part of young people's lives and graduating seniors are part of the most recent addition of the workforce, this research is significant. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore what communication behaviors graduating seniors utilize appropriately and inappropriately in an employment interview.

The current study attempts to investigate graduating seniors' communication behaviors in an employment interview. By using qualitative procedures and talking to recruiters, research is done involving the perceived appropriate behaviors in an employment interview. Perceptions of the workplace and specific behaviors are studied to gain a deeper understanding of the proposed phenomenon.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

To best understand the current phenomenon, previous research is taken into account. To better understand the perceptions graduating seniors acquire about the workforce, literature involving socialization sources is reviewed. Specific appropriate employment interview behaviors are also studied to compare in the current study. Finally, expectancy violations theory is applied.

### *Socialization Sources*

To understand the impressions graduating seniors get about working, looking at their informational sources is essential. Looking at these sources from the age of adolescence is crucial as it's the range of ages before the current careers being studied. There are five main socialization sources from which adolescents learn: family, educational institutions, the media, peers, and volunteer or part-time jobs (Feij, 1998). A reason that family and specifically

parents are so important to the development of children is that children are assumed to internalize the rules, attitudes, and expectations of their parents (Schonpflug, 2001). Parents help their children to understand what it means to work and parents also play a role in helping their child consider future careers (Feij, 1998). Another important influence is educational institutions because by the time kids reach age eighteen, most have spent twelve or more years in an academic institution. Within this time, adolescents spend more time in school than in any other place outside their homes so experiences at school play a vital role in the shaping of one's developmental trajectories (Roeser, Eccles, & Stroble, 1998). Another important influence identified is the influence of the media. For example, television portrays a variety of different workplaces (e.g., law firms, hospitals, restaurants, businesses) and shows people involved in different activities within these organizations which can provide information as well as introduce different careers to young people that they may not have considered before (Levine & Hoffner, 2006). Finally, peer groups form a natural context for thinking about the future (Kiuru, Aunola, Vuori, & Nurmi, 2007). These socialization sources are important as informational sources in younger generation's lives.

### *Job Interview Protocol*

After learning how adolescents are influenced and by whom or what, we can then look at how these influences may affect their performance in job interviews. In a job interview setting, applicants strive to manage their gestures, facial expressions, dress, personal appearance, and spoken words that might jointly or independently affect the interviewer evaluations (Tsai, Huang, & Yu, 2012). This is done because positive and strong nonverbal and verbal behaviors lead to positive end-of-interview ratings (Howard & Ferris, 1996). While using nonverbal cues to attribute personality characteristics to the applicant, the interviewer may also use verbal responses to assess the job-related knowledge and skills of the applicant (Conway & Peneno, 1999). Feingold (1992) and Albright, Kenny, and Malloy (1988) posited that a good example of nonverbal assumptions is that physical appearance is associated with perceptions of extraversion, dominance, warmth, and intelligence. Also, using smiles, eye contact, hand gestures, and head movements lead interviewers to think of directness, honesty, consciousness, warmth, and friendliness (DeGroot & Gooty, 2009). These two different behaviors can lead to very different assumptions by the interviewer but yet somewhat similar. These behaviors are complex and lead the recruiter to different evaluations of the candidate. However, pairing all of these behaviors together in an appropriately deemed way can help present the applicant in an extremely favorable and positive light to have a truly successful interview.

There are many other behaviors to consider when attempting to present oneself in a favorable context. Applicants should try to put themselves in a positive light as well as try to convince interviewers that they are worth the interviewer's time (Tsai et al., 2012). Students who view themselves as more qualified for the job have a more favorable initial impression and evaluation (Barrick, Dustin, Giluk, Steward, Shaffer, & Swider, 2012). Increased skill and confidence could result in more positive nonverbal communication (McShane, 1993), a firmer handshake, greater ability to convey competence, and better use of impression-management tactics. All of the previously stated improve initial impressions. Some other good traits that correlate with interview success are conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness, and openness to experiences (Van Dam, 2003).

**Verbal skill.** Verbal communication is one of the most important skills to be an effective communicator as it provides explicit cues about individuals and groups (Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, & Fillenbaum, 1960). Halliday (1994) explained that "communication is more than merely an exchange of words between parties; it is a sociological encounter and through exchanges of meanings in the communication process, social reality is created, maintained and modified (p.22)." Barrick, Shaffer, & DeGrassi (2009) stated that research has noted that verbal skill does not focus on the actual substance of a candidate's responses, but is instead the spontaneous and consciously controlled expressions of thoughts and emotions. DeGroot and Motowidlo (1999) stated that verbal skill includes the style of delivery (e.g., speech rate and pitch) and fluency. The applicants' verbal responses to interview questions are one of the most influential factors in the hiring decision of the interviewer as verbal messages influence evaluations of the speaker (Burgoon & LePoire, 1993). Interviewees should be cautious of their initial verbal responses because verbal behavior can be assessed accurately within a few minutes and these judgments made are similar and accurate to other channels (Barrick et al., 2012). Even when initial impressions are not accurate, they are still very strong and are hard to prove wrong. Barrick et al. (2009) stated that appropriate verbal skills also have a positive correlation to end-of-interview ratings.

During an interview, there are several types of verbal behaviors that are known to be inappropriate. For example, slang, in all of its forms, is used to rebel against social structures (Moore, 2004), and is thus viewed negatively in an employment interview setting. Research also suggests that swearing is perceived as inappropriate in formal settings such as employment interviews (Selnow, 1985). A reason for this perception is that swearing more

often occurs in informal settings and interactions (Bayard & Krishnayya, 2001) so that when it does occur in formal settings, it violates expectancies (Johnson & Lewis, 2010). Verbal skill is a large area of research that encompasses many different nuances and facets of human speech. There are still differing thoughts on whether verbal or nonverbal behaviors are more important meaning that graduating seniors should strive to excel at both.

**Nonverbal cues.** Although verbal skills are very important in an interview, applicants' nonverbal cues can predict interviewer evaluations better than verbal content (Tsai et al., 2012). It is also said that non-verbal behaviors serve to facilitate the flow of verbal information in job interviews (Tsai et al., 2012). Sundaram and Webster (2000) add that non-verbal cues can also help reduce physical distance between service employees and customers thereby improving the exchange (which is something service industry interviewers want in an employee). Some interviewers place greater weight on nonverbal cues in interviews when the interviewee is interviewing to work in a high customer-contact situation where there is little to no interaction; this means nonverbal cues are heavily relied upon (Tews, Stafford, & Zhu, 2009). Nonverbal cues can be very effective to induce positive personality attributions which in turn lead to favorable interviewer evaluations. Research indicates that interviewees who demonstrate more positive facial expressions, such as smiling, experience more positive outcomes than those who appear more inhibited (Anderson & Shackelton, 1990).

**Smiling.** An important and positive non-verbal cue to consider is smiling during an interview. Applicants that utilize genuine smiles in job interviews are seen as more competent and hireable than those displaying fake smiles (Woodzicka, 2008). Those displaying false smiling during interviews (regardless of sex) have worse interview evaluations than those genuinely smiling (Woodzicka, 2008). Genuine smiling is also associated with ratings of increased sincerity and likelihood to hire the interviewee whereas non-genuine smiling was associated with ratings of negative evaluations of the competence and intelligence of the interviewee (Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2005). When considering gender, much research has been done on how women compare to men.

Smiling is not the same between sexes. Prkachin and Silverman (2002) indicated that women display more non-genuine smiles than men do because women are socialized to smile in situations that are not necessarily associated with happiness (Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2001) to deal with things such as challenging situations. They also use false smiles to deal with negotiating difficult situations and maintaining smooth interpersonal relationships (Woodzicka, 2008). Finally, they may have learned non-smiling techniques because non-smiling women are often judged more severely than non-smiling men (Woodzicka, 2008). Because of how often women use false smiling, they are more accurate decoders of other women's non-genuine smiles than are men (Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2005). Also, women using false smiling are judged more harshly during job interviews than women using genuine smiles (Woodzicka, 2008). Women using false smiling are sometimes seen as more flirtatious and fake than non-smiling women (Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2005). When false smiles were used to attempt to mask negative emotions, women were rated as less competent and hireable than men who displayed false smiles for the same reason. This research suggests that, overall; women must be much more aware of their smiling habits in interviews and always use genuine smiles. Barrick et al. (2009) include that facial appearance, body shape, and grooming also comprises non-verbal behaviors like gestures, eye contact, and smiling are all a part of physical appearance.

**Physical appearance.** Physical appearance, including appropriate dress, has been found to correlate with interviewer evaluations (Barrick et al., 2009). Feingold (1992) posits that this correlation has to do with the mentality that "what is beautiful is good." Barrick et al. (2009) stated that physical appearance has also been found to induce favorable emotion-based responses on the part of receivers. Grove and Fisk (1989) point out that a favorable appearance is most important when the job an applicant is interviewing for a position that requires its occupants to perform before a large audience or the job requires a high degree of contact between its occupants and customers. When dealing with more attractive salespeople, customers behave more cordially, respond to sales pitches more readily, and have higher purchase intentions (Reingen & Kernan, 1993). It is important to mention that people's evaluation of an individual is more susceptible to the ratee's physical appearance in the early stage of personal interaction than in latter stages (Riggio, Widaman, Tucker, & Salinas, 1991). Although it is illegal to ask questions involving physical attractiveness, it is important to include as a possible reason for the appearance of themes. Along with how others see another, it is important to note how eye contact plays a role in the process.

**Eye contact.** Another issue to take into account is gaze and gaze aversion. Mann, Vrij, & Bull (2004) state that in their study, 99 British police officers were asked how they could tell that someone was lying: seventy-three percent of them reported that liars avert their gaze, but cue and body movements were only mentioned by twenty-

five percent. Knowing this, we need to be aware of our eye contact during an employment interview. In reality, liars did not exhibit more or less gaze aversion than truth tellers did overall but truth tellers did display less deliberate eye contact (Mann, Vrij, Leal, Anders Granhag, Warmelink, & Forrester, 2012). However, gaze aversion is not a reliable source of liars. Lie detectors should focus on a variety of cues (Vrij, 2008). But it is very important to realize how gaze is interpreted by the person being interacted with. Even when not lying, gaze aversion increases when a person's cognitive load increases (Doherty-Sneddon, Bruce, Bonner, Longbotham, & Doyle, 2002) and can imply lying or other traits that are not present.

**Extrovert advantage.** De Fruyt and Mervielde (1999) along with others posit that existing personality research in an interview setting says extroversion is the most important personality correlation with end-of-interview evaluations. McCrae and Costa (1987), along with Watson and Clark (1997) define extroverts as being gregarious, friendly, talkative, assertive, and socially adept as well as expressive, active, and enthusiastic (Barrick et al., 2012). Fletcher (1987) found that research shows interviewers are positively influenced by the socially outgoing characteristics of extroverted individuals. They are also known to show a variety of interpersonal tactics that help them get ahead (Barrick et al., 2012). Tett and Burnett (2003) explain that for an extrovert, rapport building is easier as it is displaying their natural characteristics and tendencies. Thus, the social interaction required in rapport building should give extroverts an advantage. Adapting extroverted personality traits in interviews can help one get ahead and stand out.

**Initial impressions.** Something very important to consider is the time frame allotted to make an impression. If one's time is not used effectively, all the other behaviors listed will not help. Barrick et al. (2012) explain that time restraints and first impressions are a major reality and potential struggle of interviewing. Barrick, Swider, and Stewart (2010) stated that building rapport by making light conversation about things like weather or hobbies is considered an important part of the interview process. Jones (1990) stated that initial impressions strongly influence expectations and behavior judgment. One study instructed interviewers to place an 'X' on a sheet of paper when they had decided whether or not to accept or reject the applicant. The study found that the interviewers had their minds made up within a few minutes (Springbett, 1958). Arvey and Campion (1982) and Judge, Higgins, and Cable (2000) posit that major reviews of the employment interview suggest that hiring decisions are made early in the interview and one study suggests it may be as early as four minutes into a thirty minute interview. If interviewers are deciding so early, rapport building may be critical. Even more interestingly, shorter periods of observation did not yield more accurate information when compared to longer observations. Under half-minute observations did not differ significantly from four to five minute observations (Barrick et al., 2012). When meeting a person for the first time, a person forms reactions almost instantaneously and effortlessly based on very minimal information.

However, people with interview experience were also more likely to do better in interviews. Fletcher (1990) stated that experienced interviewees were likely to build a more positive initial impression by maintaining eye contact, projecting a good image, asking questions, being assertive, and preparing for the interview. Experienced individuals were also more effective at interviewing which helped them make a positive initial impression (Barrick et al., 2012). They also had a smoother performance with less effort and rarely made noticeable mistakes. Overall, preparation, correct verbal and nonverbal cues, and a positive initial impression can help immensely in getting the job.

### *Expectancy Violations Theory*

Expectancy violations theory (EVT) states that expectations of others' behaviors "serve as perceptual filters, significantly influencing how social information is processed" (Burgoon, 1993, p. 32). An example of EVT is when a person is expected to respond with "thank you" after receiving a gift. When expectancy is violated, the conversation moves to the violation and social evaluations of the violator (Floyd & Voloudakis, 1999). Furthermore, individuals who violate the expected behaviors are often evaluated more negatively than those who follow the expected norms (Johnson & Lewis, 2010). Burgoon (1993) observed that the expectancies develop based on: communicator, relationship, and context characteristics.

As previously stated, each generation in the workforce has different attitudes and values and by extension, expectancies. Newer members to the professional world, Millennials, are trying to be successful in the workforce and that involves getting interviewed and potentially employed by someone that is oftentimes of a different generation than themselves. It would make sense, then, that to effectively communicate with these other generations, a Millennial would be expected to have aligning attitudes and values because, as previously stated, when these expectancies are violated, there are negative outcomes such as negative social evaluations which, by extension,

would result in a negative interview evaluation. However, specific behaviors learned by graduating seniors may not lead to shared attitudes and values. A miscommunication or negative evaluation is then expected as the recruiter may not completely understand or identify with the interviewee.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Graduating seniors' perceptions of the workforce affect their behaviors. Their perceptions shape how they feel they should act, thus impacting how they do. Being such an important influencing factor, understanding graduating seniors' perceptions of the workforce is crucial. Thus, I pose this question:

RQ1: How do recruiters describe graduating college seniors' perceptions of the workplace as communicated during the employment interview?

In an employment interview setting, applicants attempt to manage their behaviors including: gestures, facial expressions, dress, personal appearance, and spoken words because these behaviors might independently or jointly affect the recruiter evaluations (Tsai et al., 2012). This is done because positive behaviors lead to positive end-of-interview evaluations (Howard & Ferris, 1996). Individuals who violate the expected behaviors of the recruiters are often evaluated more negatively than those who follow the expected norms (Johnson & Lewis, 2010). To investigate the use of appropriate or inappropriate behaviors as deemed by the recruiter, the following question is posed:

RQ2: How do recruiters describe the communication behavior of graduating seniors during the employment interview?

## METHODS

The current study uses qualitative means of research to gain a deeper understanding about the present phenomenon. Participants were people who regularly interview graduating seniors in a professional employment interview. Data was collected using interview protocol and follow-up questions to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

### *Methods Description*

A semi-structured interview protocol was used. To gain a deeper understanding, probing questions were used. Types of probes employed were: follow up, informational, mirror, nudging, reflective, silent, and restatement or repeat (Query & Kreps, 1995). During interviews, questions were asked pertaining to job interview communication behaviors including: verbal, nonverbal, and socialization sources. More specific topics that were included in questioning included smiling, eye contact, and extroversion.

For this research, the interpretive paradigm was the most appropriate. It allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions and to gain information effectively using the participant's verbal cues. Being an interpretive study, it allowed the researcher to also explore the topic openly and for interviewees to express their thoughts and opinions openly (Esterberg, 2002).

### *Participants*

There were 12 total interviews completed; three were with males and nine were with females. All participants were either currently a recruiter or previously a recruiter with the caveat that they held the profession within the past year and they were in that position for at least one and a half years. The youngest participant was 24 and the oldest participant was 52 with an average age of 34.9. All participants live in Wisconsin or a surrounding state. Participants were sought through Eagle Opportunities or the UW-L Career Services Center. Some participants were gained through word of mouth and referrals. All participants were emailed with broad details of the study as to not persuade them. The time and place were then chosen for the participant's convenience.

### *Procedure*

Each interview was completed one-on-one in a secure location. Three of the interviews were completed in person in the interviewee's office at their place of work. Nine of the interviews were completed over the phone with the researcher either in a private study room on campus at UW-L or in a room in the researcher's home. The shortest interview was 10 minutes long and the longest interview was one hour with the interviews averaging 27.70 minutes in length. None of the participants were known to the interviewer previous to the interview.

At the beginning of the interview, rapport building occurred. It began by asking the participant basic questions about him or herself to get to know them and to help them feel comfortable. This is also when guidelines were laid out and the participant was asked to look over the informed consent form and ask any questions they may have. They were then asked to again give verbal consent to being interviewed with the use of a digital recorder. With their

confirmation and signature, the interview began. Questions were asked based on their experiences with graduating seniors in job interview settings. The interviewer asked questions about the job perceptions of graduating seniors, their verbal skills, and their nonverbal skills (specifically smiling, eye contact, and extroversion). Follow-up questions were asked and varied based on the interview content.

### Analysis

Data was analyzed using the foundational method for qualitative research: thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using this method, data was analyzed through a 5 step process. The first step is to get familiar with the data where the transcripts were read several times and initial notes were made. Next was to generate the initial codes focusing on one research question at a time. After that, themes were sought out. Next was reviewing the themes. Finally, the themes were defined and named. After the themes were established, axial coding occurred. Similar themes, categories, and subcategories were connected. This process was repeated until no new themes emerged. Overall, the transcripts were read several times to ensure that sufficient coding and data saturation had occurred.

## RESULTS

Through thematic analysis of data collected, themes for each research questions emerged. These themes uncover a deeper understanding of graduating seniors in interviews and the level of their success.

*RQ1: How do recruiters describe graduating college seniors' perceptions of the workplace as communicated during the employment interview?*

In response to the first research question, two themes emerged. These themes present a deep understanding of the question posed and clearly voice the opinions of the recruiters involved.

**Previous work experience.** The main theme that emerged when asked about the perceptions of graduating seniors in employment interviews was that previous experience can make all the difference. Candidates who have previous work experience seem to do better in professional interviews. Janet stated:

*I think often times they have had very little office work experience so they don't have anything to really draw on in terms of their knowledge of what it would be like to sit in a cubicle all day or what it might be like to work in some of the office type environments.*

It seems that the socialization sources other than previous work environments are not doing a sufficient job of training graduating seniors how to interview appropriately. Some participants stated that someone who is new to the professional world does not do well in interviews. An example of this is when Darcy stated:

*You know, obviously someone who has been in the workforce, they're going to have that experience and it's gonna be not as new to them as somebody who is just being exposed to it so, I mean, I would say their perceptions are going to be different just because it's all new.*

Another nuance attributed to having experience in the field is the knowledge of the business world as a whole. Lisa touched on this when she said:

*I would say it differs in that realistic nature of what the job is so someone that, an older age group that has work experience knows more to step out into the business world and often in this environment and politics whereas someone right out of school may not have as much of a realistic preview of what that environment looks like.*

Two participants stated other than previous jobs; internships also are important socialization sources of the workforce. These types of introductory positions can help a graduating senior get a handle on the work environment. Lisa stated:

*I think it's tough for students to know exactly what they're getting into when they start a full time position or the regular kind of working world is like if they haven't had an internship experience.*

Brenda also shared views on the importance of internships:

*And I know that it seems like right now when those that graduate, they always have to do more internships lately, it seems like that's one of the requirements lately. I think that's very beneficial because then you've been not necessarily in the environment that you would want but you've been at least exposed to the work aspect of the job.*

Some participants conveyed that not all graduating seniors have the wrong perception. Some have it right, but it really just depends on the person. But again, previous work experience plays a big part in the correct perceptions of the workplace and how to behave in an acceptable manner. According to Carol:

*I think they have some realistic expectations about what the world of work is all about. I think it varies from student to student, you know, every person is different. If you have been a student that has never worked while going to college, the perception is a little bit different. I think they have a harder time jumping into a career than someone who's been working while going to school. From what I see I think they have a little bit of a better understanding of what they're getting into. Work is work and it's not always fun. I think it's mixed, I really do.*

Without previous work experience, graduating seniors are not properly prepared for employment interviews. Other socialization sources are not properly preparing graduating seniors to display what is expected in employment interviews.

**Sense of entitlement.** The next main theme is that of graduating seniors feeling a sense of entitlement. Many participants stated that graduating seniors coming into the interview come in and feel like they deserve a high position right away. Garrett stated:

*... various kinds of sense of entitlement even without experience. They're expecting to come in to maybe a mid management level or an upper management level and they're expecting to be rewarded right away for their efforts. And obviously that's a negative thing that comes out during the interview process.*

Some participants luckily understand this view point though so it does not seem to affect their decisions as much. Heather even said, "I know I had that perception when I graduated." The variation between participants is also inevitable because they are people and not all people are the same so not all recruiters are the same. Some view things much more negatively than others and vice versa.

Recruiters mentioned that graduating seniors forget that they have to climb the metaphorical ladder. Janet mentioned specific skills that people come into the workforce with and reiterated that it is important to work one's way up. She stated that people come in expecting to do well because they have an education behind them but what graduating seniors have to realize is that just because you have an education does not mean you have enough knowledge of the company to be in a management role right away. Being humble goes a long way. Graduating seniors have a hard time remembering that they are going to have to work their way up.

Graduating seniors also do not seem to recognize the extent of work that needs to be done. Lisa explained that graduating seniors do not seem to understand that sometimes one has to take their work home with them. She states:

*If their perception is the position is one where they have to work additional hours or they're having to put in more work and maybe their perception is that they're just needing to work an 8 to 5, punch the service in. They might not necessarily be putting in enough compared to what the job may require so there are some instances where the perceptions they have may have an impact on the work that they do.*

Yet another form of entitlement is "the attitude of what can my business offer them [compared to] what that candidate has to offer my business," a point that Frank brought up. Here, the sense of entitlement is brought to a level of perceived self-centeredness. Frank then brings up that graduating seniors do not have the knowledge yet to know about the workforce. He states:

*So a lot of times, that's why I think their perceptions are sometimes skewed. It's "so am I going to be able to do this" and "what about this" instead of a real understanding of what the position entails and then how their strengths as a leader or as a person, however it might be, are going to improve the company.*

The sense of entitlement was a common negative theme in the current study. The two themes that emerged demonstrate a new understanding of the difference perceptions can play in an employment interview.

*RQ2: How do recruiters describe the communication behavior of graduating seniors during the employment interview?*

Questions were then asked to understand the communication behaviors of graduating seniors in employment interviews. These questions lead to four themes.

**Portrayal.** The image a candidate portrays of him/herself is instrumental in having a good job interview. Darcy stated that when you are in an interview "you're on your best behavior, so to speak, and you want to make a good impression." Janet believed that "the interview starts with first contact and I think some people, especially the college grads, may lose sight of that." Brenda said that "nonverbal cues start from your appearance so regardless of what type of job you're interviewing for, appearance is going to be a big factor." When the expectancies of the recruiters are violated, the interviews turn out poorly for the candidate. Each recruiter had specific, memorable examples of interviews because they violated their expectancies so much. Here is a story from Darcy:

*He had a nervous laughter throughout the whole interview. Things like stressful situations, we wanted him to talk about, and you know, he just kinda laughed it off. "When my coworker did this," and he was laughing and smiling about it and it wasn't a funny event but yet he was just, I don't know if you try to bring humor and make light of a situation it almost, you can do that to an extent but when you're talking about a serious thing, you want to show that they have some compassion.*

Here, Darcy's expectancies of how the candidate should have handled the situation and the retelling of the situation were violated and the meaning of the story was lost. The portrayal of that candidate was now viewed in a negative light. Every action is seen as a part of someone's portrayal of themselves. Heather even pointed out the chair someone was sitting in:

*The thing I notice is you put somebody in an office chair that rolls and spins and all that good stuff, sometimes that can be a downfall because, looking at our conference room chairs, they're just a chair so if you want to sit back in it you kind of do tend to slouch a little bit so maybe that and some twisting and moving, the constant moving of your chair, it's a mindless thing.*

Lisa also pointed out that "sometimes you'll have the student that has poor posture." The nonverbal cues are constantly being noticed and noted upon. Garrett stated, "there are a few occasions where maybe there's some slouching or maybe playing with hair too much or come in like they just got out of the shower or something along those lines." Frank also pointed out that, "I've seen [candidates] a little bit too relaxed." Every nonverbal expression is a portrayal of oneself and recruiters remember the negative ones and take note. These unprofessional or casual portrayals of one violate the expectancies of the recruiters so the candidate is now seen in a more negative light than before.

Being too casual for interviews is not seen in a positive light. Lisa stated that "from a negative perspective there's a candidate that stands out in my mind that was very casual in nature. Not so much in his appearance because he was dressed nicely but casual just in how he held himself so how he sat in the chair, how he leaned up against the armrest." Being too casual with posture is also an issue as Janet states: "Posture can sometimes be an issue depending on the person and their personality. I have seen a lot more people be a little too casual."

A big part of portrayal is a person's dress. Six of the 12 participants interviewed pointed out dress as a problem. Darcy stated that "I've seen some people who really just do not come dressed for an interview and that's really unfortunate." Garrett mentioned someone arriving in jeans, Brenda had a story of someone in pajamas, and Carol had another example of inappropriate dress. Of those that mentioned dress, the majority stated that they preferred when candidates were overdressed as opposed to underdressed.

**Stress.** Nerves are a key weakness in graduating seniors' job interview behaviors. Janet stated that "I think sometimes they get nervous. Sometimes they're trying to put their best foot forward and they stumble over a few things." Nerves take all different forms. Emily explained it as "I could tell some of them would just get uncomfortable when I said 'what's your knowledge of this company' and they would just giggle, you could just tell they weren't as serious about it." Janet stated:

*I think sometimes younger people do struggle with eye contact and being able to share information and carry on a conversation and look at you without doing one of two things. They either get that kind of deer in the headlight stare and they're still talking but they're not blinking, I mean you can really see they're nervous about something, or they'll look down at the table or they'll look down at their hands and not be able to look you in the eye and carry on a general conversation. We try our best to really set people at ease during the interview process but I think that can be a very difficult thing for the younger people, especially to be able to just look at you and carry on that conversation.*

Eye contact as a form of nerves was mentioned more than once. Heather stated that "going back to nerves, they don't want to look someone in the eye." Lisa also stated that "when students tend to be nervous the eye contact lacks a little bit just cause of that nervous level I think." Nerves can take place in many different forms.

Another form of nerves is in the verbal expressions. Heather stated that "a handful [of candidates] are so nervous that they have a really hard time telling about themselves." Candidates get so nervous that they cannot effectively communicate verbally. Janet expects quiet or pauses and vocal fillers as a part of nerves. In extreme examples, nerves mean crying. Three participants reported a candidate breaking down to the point of tears. Carol recalled a candidate remembering the stress during a story and the candidate started crying while telling it. Garrett also noted people that cried in interviews. Crying is an extreme form of stress and violates the recruiter's expectancies. Heather's example as stated:



*I had someone who came into an interview and, like I said, it's typical for us to have more than one person in an interview and the person got in and we did introductions and started talking about the job and started asking questions and on the third or fourth question they just broke down and started crying and bawling.*

**Expressiveness.** Several recruiters commented on the verbal skills of the candidates they interviewed. Frank stated frustration with the way that candidates presented their accomplishments saying "I think a lot of these candidates have done this stuff but they're not putting it in the right way."

Vocal fillers were mentioned several times. Ingrid stated that fillers like "mmhmm" or "yup" are used too frequently. Kyle stated the same fillers and other words like "cool" or phrases like "you know" to which he thinks "no, I don't know." The phrase "you know" was also pointed out negatively by Janet who had a similar response as Kyle did. Another form of expressiveness is being specific. Brenda stated:

*I think some of the questions stump them because it's a very specific item. Like a specific work experience where you had to deal with a coworker that you had difficulty getting along with or in your last year, how many times have you been absent from work. You need to listen what is being asked and you have to answer what is being asked of you. You need very specific answers, not vague ones.*

Specific answers are something most interviewers seem to want. Janet also stated getting frustrated with answers that were not specific enough. Darcy stated that "we want to know examples like the behavioral, like show us an example, tell us about a time where this happened to you," and to overall be more specific in communication. Specificity is important in interviewing as these recruiters have stated and demonstrated. Janet also touched on behavioral questions:

*The piece that I think people struggle with is being able to answer what we call the behavioral based questions which are typically "tell me about a time, give me an example of," and we're looking for very specific scenarios that people have been faced with so I might ask them to tell me about a time that you dealt with a very difficult customer and they start into the generals as sometimes when customers are difficult I would do this as opposed to giving me the exact answer.*

**Job specific.** There are certain actions in interviews that can be seen as job specific. When asked about extroversion, recruiters had differing opinions based on the job. If the job was something where extroversion was valued, being extroverted in the interview was seen as a good thing. When the job was something more introverted, extroversion was seen as a hindrance. Carol said that candidates "don't display their extroversion and I'm not saying that's a bad thing. I think when they're coming for an interview or they're coming for a job they need to be a little bit more reserved." So extroversion is appropriate in different degrees in different situations and also for different positions. Lisa said:

*That's such a personal characteristic. That varies so much from candidate to candidate just depending on their own personality so that makes one a little bit harder to gauge but you know some positions where we want extroversion I think we tend to see it but for positions where we want more of your analytical, quiet person, we tend to see it there as well.*

Emily stated that when she's recruiting for a sales position, she looks for extroverted individuals and they have a better chance at getting the job because that's the personality they need for the position. Darcy also stated that it was dependent on the position:

*It doesn't really negatively affect them necessarily, it depends on the position that they're interview for. It truly does. I mean, if they're going to be in a leadership position and they're going to have to lead a crew or they're going to be in the public a lot obviously you've gotta have some of those skills to be able to transition, it just depends.*

Again, these recruiters acknowledge that specific positions need specific degrees of extroversion. Brenda had an example as well:

*If you're applying for a PR job, well of course you're going to want somebody that is probably a little more extroverted. I'm just trying to think here, being introverted is not such a bad thing. It might take them longer to get comfortable in the position that they're in. Being extroverted has it's pluses but there's a difference between being extroverted and being too much but again, it comes down to the job you're applying for.*

Extroversion and other actions can be seen as appropriate if you are in the correct job setting where those actions are deemed as acceptable and appropriate for the position.

The four themes presented here display a deep and clear understanding about job interview behaviors displayed by graduating seniors. This research helped to fill a gap presented by the lack of previous research done on current graduating seniors.

## DISCUSSION

By looking through the results and analyzing the themes of each research question, many conclusions can be drawn. When violations of expected behavior are broken, people are more often evaluated more negatively than those who follow the expected norms (Johnson & Lewis, 2010) which enforces why candidates need to be aware of expected and appropriate behaviors in employment interviews.

*RQ1: How do recruiters describe graduating college seniors' perceptions of the workplace as communicated during the employment interview?*

The first theme to answer this question deals with previous work experience of the candidate. If a candidate had previous work experience, or an internship, the candidate had much more accurate perceptions of the workplace and could communicate this knowledge during the interview. When they did not have this previous experience, they did not have accurate perceptions that they could portray during the interview.

The socialization sources as to where these perceptions come from were also mentioned. Work experience was the main one mentioned but if that was not there in the candidate's experiences, they did not seem to have accurate perceptions. This means that the other socialization sources identified did not hold accurate portrayals of the work force. The other socialization sources identified were family, educational institutions, media and peers (Feij, 1998). These sources, then, are seen as giving inaccurate information about the current workplace to graduating seniors.

The second theme, sense of entitlement, did not show up in my literature review. This was a completely new idea that ended up being extremely significant. Adding this idea to future research could be extremely beneficial in understanding Millennials going into the workforce and the ideas they hold.

Expectancy violations theory is a crucial tool in helping to tie the literature together. When recruiters' expectancies were violated, the candidates were perceived as a better hire. This is backed up with previous literature. For example, Johnson and Lewis (2010) stated that individuals who violate the expected behaviors are often evaluated more negatively than those who follow the expected norms.

*RQ2: How do recruiters describe the communication behavior of graduating seniors during the employment interview?*

The first theme of the second research question was portrayal. This theme aligned with previous data. To be considered for hiring, a favorable appearance leads to positive end-of-interview evaluations as also found by Grove and Fisk (1989). Having appropriate verbal and nonverbal skills lead to the absence of violations of expectancies and lead to a more positive interview which also lead to the interviewer describing a more pleasant experience in the interview.

Not being too stressed is also a key factor in being a successful interviewee. All 12 participants had stories of inappropriate behaviors that resulted from stress or nerves. Graduating seniors have a huge disadvantage as compared to other interviewees as letting stress get to them and affect the quality of an interview if they are inexperienced in interviewing. When they are more experienced with interviewing, as my research states, they are better at controlling their nerves. To be successful, this age group must learn to take a deep breath and stay calm. Remaining emotionally stable positively correlates with interview success (Van Dam, 2003). The current study supports and extends the previous research.

Another area needing improvement is the verbal skill of graduating seniors. There are many different areas covered here. Vocal fillers are a hindrance to the interviewee and an annoyance to the interviewer as stated in previous research. When verbal skill is used appropriately, it can lead to strong positive correlation to end-of-interview ratings (Barrick et al., 2009).

Using vague generalities are also a weak point. Instead of describing specific events, graduating seniors use words like "stuff" and "things." When behavioral based questions are asked and interviewers are looking for specific examples, graduating seniors still give them vague and general answers that do not answer the question. This did not come out in the literature review and was not an expected result of the study.

While exploring the sense of entitlement in graduating seniors, some of these actions could be a result of too much confidence. As found in previous research, students who view themselves as more qualified and are confident

in the job make a more favorable initial impression (Barrick et al., 2012). This study, and others, proved that there is a fine line between appropriate behaviors and inappropriate behaviors when attempting to not violate expectancies. Different participants said different things stating that some extroversion was okay, but too much was not. Another stated that some eye contact is okay, but too much is not. Being nervous was somewhat okay, until it impacted too much of one's interviewing behaviors. This aspect is specific to recruiters and cannot always be planned and accommodated for. Abby even stated (when talking about vocal fillers) that "a certain amount of it kind of shows that you're a person and that you're not a robot."

This conclusion did not align with previous research. As demonstrated in the literature review, extroversion was said to always relate to positive outcomes (De Fruyt & Mervielde, 1999). The characteristics extroverts portrayed including being gregarious, friendly, talkative, assertive, and socially adept (Watson & Clark, 1997) were viewed as relating to positive evaluations (Fletcher, 1987). This was not the case in the current study which found that extroversion was seen as a positive characteristic when it aligned with the job description of which one was applying.

## LIMITATIONS

The purpose of this study was to discover appropriate and non appropriate behaviors being utilized by graduating seniors in employment interviews. A limitation of this research was the age and gender of the participants in the current study. Other demographics like social status or race were not taken into account while looking for recruiters. Because of the limited time and available participants, the researcher was not able to choose participants based on their age, gender, and other demographics and how those factors may affect employment interviews. Because of this limitation, some answers may be skewed. For example, younger interviewers seemed to be more lenient towards vocal fillers but there is not enough evidence in the current study to claim such a theme. Another possible theme was if one gender judges a specific gender more harshly. For example, are women recruiters more inclined to hire men or women is a question this study cannot answer accurately.

Another limitation was the sample size. 12 recruiters is an extremely small sample when looking at how many are located in Wisconsin and surrounding states. It is possible that with a larger sample size, other themes may emerge. Along with the sample size, location was also a limitation. While most were from the La Crosse County area, this could have skewed the current results.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research needs to be done to further delve into themes. It is possible that these themes only occur locally so a study with more diverse participants may also help to identify themes. It is possible that these are La Crosse County related or only occur in the Midwest. A future study could compare these results with those in other cities, states, or possibly even other nations.

Another question to be answered with future research is the existence of the fine lines. Maybe the lines of inappropriate versus appropriate are consistent within age groups or possibly even gender. Delving more into the multigenerational aspect of interviewer and interviewees may emit new themes as to why certain phenomena occur in employment interviews. Altering the age and gender of the recruiter could play a key role in certain themes emerging and is a study suggested for future research. Things like race, sexual orientation, social status, and others may also play a role in certain themes that emerge. Future research needs to be done to uncover more about current employment interviews among graduating seniors.

Another helpful future study would be ethnography. It is possible that recruiters were not completely honest which would skew the current study's results. With ethnography, another advantage would be to delve further into the possible correlation of physical attraction with positive end-of-interview evaluations. There are many other possibilities of studies that would help better understand this communication phenomenon.

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## APPENDIX

### Interview Protocol

- 1) Briefly describe yourself.
  - a. What is your age?
  - b. What is your profession?
- 2) Briefly describe your interactions with graduating seniors.
  - a. How often do you interview them?
  - b. About how many do you interview in a given year?
- 3) How would you describe the perceptions of the workplace of graduating seniors?
  - a. Are they often accurate? If not, why?
  - b. How do their perceptions differ from others?
- 4) How would you describe graduating seniors' communication in interviews?
  - a. Do they have appropriate verbal expressions? If not, why?
  - b. Do they have appropriate nonverbal cues? If not, why?
- 5) What are specific nonverbal cues that are memorably conveyed, whether in a positive or negative way?
  - a. Do most interviewees use smiling appropriately?
  - b. Do most interviewees use eye contact appropriately?
  - c. Do most interviewees use extroversion appropriately?
- 6) What, if any, advice would you give to graduating seniors about their communication during an employment interview?
- 7) Is there anything else you would like to tell me?