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# Meaning-Making Dynamics of Job Interview Performances

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MEANING-MAKING DYNAMICS OF JOB INTERVIEW PERFORMANCES


A Thesis Presented

by

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Applied Linguistics Program

MEANING-MAKING DYNAMICS OF JOB INTERVIEW PERFORMANCES

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ABSTRACT


MEANING-MAKING DYNAMICS OF JOB INTERVIEW PERFORMANCES


December 2021


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Directed by Professor Christian Chun

Behavioral interviewing has become a popular technique used across fields to assess the fitness of job seekers (Roulin & Bangerter, 2012; Powers, 2000). This particular style of interviewing calls on the interviewee to narrate their prior experiences in the workforce, with the idea that past behavior on the job is prelude to future job performance. The answers (stories) follow a specific format in order to be considered successful, one that adheres to the style and organization of the dominant Discourse (Gee, 1989). However, storytelling is a culturally situated practice and candidates from diverse backgrounds may construct their narratives outside of the format favored by employers. The purpose of this research is to examine the ways in which individuals with different socioeconomic, linguistic, racial and ethnic backgrounds construct narratives while answering job interview questions. Posing interview questions to job candidates who are currently receiving

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workforce development training to prepare for interviews as well as talent recruiters for job placement firms who interview job seekers for placement purposes allowed for comparison between narrative structure and content of different socioeconomic, linguistic, racial and ethnic groups: those who are currently studying to acquire credentials and become apprenticed in the dominant Discourse and those who work in talent management and recruitment and are fully conversant in the dominant Discourse. Analysis of the format and content of interviews from the two distinct groups showed marked differences in both format and content between interviews that exemplified the favored dominant Discourse and those that represented a variety of different Discourses. This leads to the conclusion that behavioral interviewing may hamper efforts to diversify the workforce, if candidates with different socioeconomic, linguistic, racial and ethnic backgrounds are being excluded from jobs based on the way they narrate responses to behavioral interview questions.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Job interviews are particularly challenging sociolinguistic situations for job seekers. They present specific situations when the lexical and grammatical choices deployed in the process of providing answers are being used to judge not only the prospective candidate's competency for the specific position to which the individual applied, but also the candidate's character and likely fit within the company culture. In the modern interview, questions posed to job seekers require the ability to tell a good story in order to display job fitness and cultural fit. These highly scrutinized stories and the ways that job seekers deploy different strategies are important to be able to obtain a position.

Unfortunately, not all interviewees are aware of how their linguistic choices may affect their potential candidacy for a given position. Language is a complex system; users can shift their usage of vocabulary, grammatical structure, register and tone based on time, place and audience. It is a "resource for making meaning" (Halliday, 2014, p. 1) and texts that individuals produce are a "process of making meaning in context" (Halliday, 2014, p. 1). Not everyone has access to or understands how to deploy varied linguistic resources to maximize effectiveness in any given situation (Gee, 2012). The choices that individuals make tend to follow patterns and these patterns can be analyzed by researchers. Critically reading texts based on strategies from Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) and tools of categorization and

analysis taken from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), I analyzed the differences between "standard, upper middle class" conventional answers to interview questions provided by talent recruiters for job placement firms in the Greater Boston area, for entry level administration positions, with those of minority dialect speakers of English and speakers of English as a second language who are currently attending courses at a workforce development non-profit organization. This approach took into account macro- and micro-levels of organization within the texts.

**Statement of Problem**

Language socialization primes individuals to interact in various social settings, giving them tools to interpret and react to the language used in school and eventually the language used at work with colleagues and employers once they enter the workforce. The composite of this socialization and the way individuals deploy linguistic resources along with their actions, expressions, etc. is their Discourse (Gee, 2012). Discourse in this case is capitalized as it refers to the term coined by Gee (1989) and refers to an individual's spoken language as well as their manner of presentation. The transition from the Discourse used at home to the Discourse in school and beyond is easier for some individuals than for others based on how closely their home Discourse aligns with the White upper-middle class dominant Discourse in the United States (Gee, 2012). These various ways of engaging with language and formative literacy practices have serious ramifications when these Discourses are evaluated within the school system. The effects of these ramifications compounds as individuals pass through the school system and into the job market.

In a job interview setting, how the narrative of a speaker (job candidate) is received contributes to how their identity is perceived by their prospective employer. "We *do* language. That may be the measure of our lives" (Butler, 1997, p. 8) and it is often also the measure of whether or not an individual is perceived as competent and capable for a particular job. With a mismatch of backgrounds, a candidate can believe that they are narrating their experiences and qualifications in a way that is easy to understand and will be well received by the listener. However, "one may well imagine oneself in ways that are quite to the contrary of how one is socially constituted" (Butler, 1997, p. 31) and one's narrative may not match what is expected by the listener. One's narrative might not be considered appropriate to the task, leading to the possible devaluation of the interviewee's candidacy by the prospective employer. Because "speakers in different subject positions have differential access to linguistic resources," (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 477) this can put certain groups of people at a disadvantage when they are in situations where they will be judged not only on their actions but also their language production. Similarly, other candidates may be over-evaluated due to a more generous interpretation of their narrative due to their racial and classed backgrounds.

A job interview is a situation that brings Gee's Discourse theory into sharp focus. During an interview, special attention is paid to one's "'saying-doing' combination" (Gee, 1989, p. 5) as prospective employers attempt to evaluate how well each candidate would perform in the position as well as their potential to fit in the culture of the company or organization. These types of interviews tend to be similarly structured. The prospective employer usually starts with the statement: "tell me about yourself." Such a statement is

deceptively open, considering that most employers have a fairly specifically calibrated answer that they are looking for. The closer the candidate comes to performing the answer in anticipation of the employer's desired answer, the better they will have been thought to have performed during the interview and therefore would likely receive a positive evaluation. The typical answer, according to many popular employment websites such as Monster.com, will draw a brief sketch of how prior education and job experience lead the candidate to have the right skill set to be perfectly suited for the open position (Skillings, 2020). After this opening, interviews proceed with a few types of questions, mostly related to past behavior and job performance. Employers believe that past performance will demonstrate future potential (Davis & Herrera, 2013), so if employees performed well at similar or transferrable tasks in a past job, they would likely do well in the new position. Each of these questions, though posed slightly differently, is formulated to elicit answers that have one, general structure that all successful answers will follow. "Evidence shows that behavioral description questions require respondents to tell stories and that storytelling is now critical to applicant' success in employment interviews" (Ralston et al., 2003, p. 8). Candidates who understand this storytelling structure have a better chance at either obtaining the job or at least being selected to continue to the next round of interviews.

A job interview is a type of genre, and because "each cultural group has its specific generic forms, developed out of the social structures characteristic of that group, and developed in its political history" (Kress, 1993, p. 36), candidates from different backgrounds may have different strategies for organizing their answers to the questions posed to them in order to satisfy the genre requirements they believe it holds. In these types of interviews,

telling one's story well is critical to an applicants' success in the employment

interview. Although interviewing offers many opportunities for applicant storytelling,

this skill is especially vital when interviewers ask behavioral description questions

because such questions demand answers in the form of stories. (Ralston et al., 2003,

p. 8)

The candidate uses their answers to present a certain identity and hope that this identity is

acknowledged by the potential employer as well as positively evaluated as a potential asset to

their team. For candidates who are minority dialect speakers or English as a second language

speakers, they must sometimes work harder than their upper middle-class White counterparts

to engineer *adequation* by demonstrating "sufficient similarity" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p.

495) to their interviewers. By downplaying differences and highlighting similarities

(Bucholtz & Hall, 2004), these candidates hope to demonstrate their competency and

capability with respect to the open position.

According to Bangerter et al. (2014):

By their very nature, past behavior questions are designed to elicit a coherent account

of what the applicant did in a particular situation. Producing such an account involves

*telling a story* about what one did in such a situation. A competent response to such a

question may involve describing actions as following from the situational constraints,

or framing particularly impressive outcomes as having being caused by one's actions.

(pp. 594-595, emphasis in original)

Whether or not a particular story is "coherent" is a judgment made by the listener, who may

or may not share a cultural background with the storyteller (job candidate), and thus may

have different criteria for what exactly constitutes a coherent narrative. Coherent in this case is in the ear of the beholder.

**Purpose and Rationale of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to examine the ways in which individuals with different socioeconomic backgrounds construct narratives while answering job interview questions. Posing interview questions to job candidates who are currently receiving workforce development training to prepare for interviews as well as talent recruiters for job placement firms who interview job seekers for placement purposes will allow for comparison between narrative structure and content of different socioeconomic groups: those seeking training in order to gain full-time employment and those who already have full-time employment. With many jobs relying on interviews that utilize behavioral questions that prompt interviewees to provide a narrative answer, it is important to understand how different groups may structure their narratives as an answer to these questions or if they grasp that the prompt is looking for a narrative answer. The results of this study can help job seekers to better understand the structure and content of answers that are anticipated by hiring managers. Conversely, hiring managers can see the different narrative styles of answers that they may get from a range of diverse candidates.

**Research Questions**

This research study was designed to address the following research questions:

1. Are there differences in the narrative structure and content of answers to job interview questions for different socioeconomic groups and linguistic groups?

2. Do talent recruiters for job placement firms, as a group, structure their answers differently than other study participants regardless of socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds?

3. What are the ways in which participants use multimodal repertoires, including linguistic repertoires, in indexing an identity that would be appealing to employers during a job interview?

**Assumptions, Limitations and Delimitations**

There are several assumptions underpinning this research about the two groups that I interviewed. The first assumption is that talent recruiters would be able to and would give "ideal" answers to each of the interview questions posed because their job involves posing interview questions to job seekers and helping them find the appropriate placement. Another assumption is that these talent managers are in touch with the expectations of companies in different fields, such as finance, medicine and higher education. Because they work closely with the hiring managers in the companies within these industries to place appropriate candidates it can be assumed that they are conversant in the needs and expectations of these companies, including candidate performance at job interviews. A third assumption is that HR professionals are the ones who primarily do the interviewing and screening for many companies who are looking to hire new employees and that these individuals are versed in and utilize the Dominant discourse to form opinions of job applicants. A final assumption is that the job seekers interviewed gave what they consider to be the best answer possible to the interview questions posed. To address the assumptions made about the talent recruiters, I interviewed talent recruiters who currently work or have worked in the recent past directly

with clients for placements so that they would have a working knowledge of expectations of companies they are placing clients with and the questions these companies will pose to interviewees as well as types of answers that they would be looking for. To address the assumptions made about the job seekers, I asked the candidates currently receiving workforce development training to pretend that they were in an actual job interview and give the best answers they could to each question.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

**Discourse and Identity**

When one considers Gee's theory of Discourse (1989, 2012), socioeconomic status, race and gender all play paramount roles in how we are socialized into our ways of using language (Gee, 2012; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1995). To Gee, Discourses with a capital D are "'ways of being in the world'. . . socially situated identities . . . always and everywhere social products of social histories" (Gee, 2012, p. 3). Each individual's primary Discourse is his or her way of talking and being when this individual is at home. As an individual advances through school and enters into the workforce, secondary Discourses help one fit into various social situations; these are acquired through practice and apprenticeship.  This language socialization is the means through which individuals acquire language used in school and eventually the language used at work with colleagues and employers once they have entered the workforce. The transition from the Discourse used at home to the expected Discourse in school and beyond is easier for some individuals than for others based on how closely their home Discourse aligns with the upper-middle class dominant Discourse in the United States (Gee, 2012). These various ways of engaging with language and formative literacy practices when different than the expectations of the Dominant discourse have serious ramifications when these Discourses are evaluated within the school system. This gap

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between expectation and performance compounds as individuals pass through the school system and into the job market.

Gee's theory has consequences for how individuals see others and how others see and judge them. Schleppegrell (2004) asserts, "the lexical and grammatical choices [individuals] make, clause by clause, simultaneously construe social relationships and experience of the world" (p. 3).  Taking both theorists views into account explains why some students are seemingly destined for success and quickly acquire the language needed to be successful in school and later the job market, while other students struggle to acquire those same Discourses. The successful students have been steeped in the Discourse that will make it easier to interact with texts as well as with teachers and administrators who share their Discourse. The students who struggle are essentially learning a second language and culture and as happens when acquiring language, will utilize language and forms that are not recognized or positively evaluated by those in the dominant Discourse.

Several researchers have explored the literacy and socialization processes within populations of minority dialect speakers of English. Heath (1983) explored the ways in which literacy socialization differs across class and race by examining three communities in a region: one White middle class, one White working class and one Black working class. She concluded that the practices of different communities produce different ways of engaging with and utilizing language and literacy skills. Purcell-Gates (1995) examined the cultural components and cyclical nature of low literacy in urban Appalachian communities in midwestern cities. Her study focused on a mother and son, specifically, but her book also details the manner in which language and literacy were generally viewed by many within the

Urban Appalachian community. People in the community at large, such as teachers and school administrators, perceived Urban Appalachians as lazy, academically uninclined and generally uninterested in school. Because of these misperceptions, educators were unable to cross the cultural divide to help their students acquire the Discourse of school. Both authors describe the different ways of making meaning that these various, non-dominant Discourse communities had and the different ways they related to speaking and reading. Because their ways of meaning making did not align with the dominant Discourse, there were negative consequences such as difficulty at school and work for those individuals.

Gumperz (1992) illustrated a way in which cultural expectations and interpretations can cause misunderstanding between individuals from different groups when they each deploy divergent communication strategies to achieve an objective. He illustrated that when viewed through different cultural lenses there can be massive breakdowns in understanding even when speaking the same language. When he transcribed and analyzed a conversation between an Indian student and British instructor at a language school, he discovered that there was a fundamental mismatch between the strategies employed by both parties in their respective attempts at explanation and request, leading to frustration and misunderstanding for both parties. The student was attempting to ingratiate himself with the instructor in order to be allowed to take a course he was interested in. However, the strategy he used to do so was misunderstood by the instructor as blaming her for his not receiving permission to take the course. In the end, the student and instructor's divergent Discourses resulted in the student not being able to get his request fulfilled by the instructor who did not understand that it was, in fact, a request.

Social class is another key factor influencing Discourse. Bernstein (1977) asserted that children from different class backgrounds responded differently to interview questions. Middle-class children seemed to have a better understanding of how to construct answers to interview questions than working-class children, especially when it came to open-ended questions, due to years of socialization in the dominant Discourse. Middle-class children were able to utilize familial interactions that approximate the same structure as those posed during the interviews in order to successfully construct appropriate answers. Should these patterns continue into adulthood, this would give these same middle-class children (now adults) a huge advantage when it comes to performance during job interviews, which are especially geared towards open-ended questions. This in great part is because of the divergence of storytelling Discourses.

**Storytelling Discourse**

While it has been said that "a timeless communication skill - the ability to tell a good story" (Ralston et al., 2003, p. 10) is a "universal human activity" (Ralston et al., 2003, p. 11), what constitutes a "good story" varies greatly by one's culture and background. Research has shed light on the ways that different cultures view storytelling and the consequences it can have for individuals whose storytelling narratives do not match those of school (Michaels, 1981; Michaels & Cazden, 1986; Michaels & Collins, 1984; Scollon & Scollon, 1984) or the judicial system (Blommaert, 2001).

Scollon and Scollon (1984) examined the storytelling structure of Athabaskans in North America. After recording and analyzing different storytellers telling a well-known, traditional story, they concluded that the Athabaskan's storytelling traditions are different

from typical western storytelling tradition in that they "emphasize indirectness and joint sensemaking" (p. 177). This means that the story itself evolves with audience participation. Interpreted through the western lens of a White resident of the area, Athabascan storytellers are perceived to "just get a bit of a story and cook it up as they go along. Mind you it's not all lies but sometimes it's blamed childish" (p. 173). The culturally different methods of storytelling led to a negative evaluation of the Athabaskan stories and storytellers by those more closely connected to the dominant Discourse. This has caused issues for Athabaskans once they have entered the school system, where storytelling narratives that follow a very different track are prioritized and valued.

These communication mismatches around storytelling style persist after school with even more severe consequences. Blommaert (2001) explored the phenomenon of individuals seeking asylum in Belgium being denied based (in part) on differences in the way that they narrated their experiences and reasons for their request. This was largely because of the expectations of the legal system surrounding the narrative style of their accounts. Aside from contending with having to narrate, often traumatic circumstances, to strangers who the asylum seekers felt may not be familiar with the necessary background information to determine the seriousness of the petition in a non-native language, there is the additional weight that these narratives provide the basis for the evidence used to judge their petition to be worthy or not of asylum. Blommaert (2001) asserted that "communicative style (including narrative style) is always a source for character assessment and character attribution" (p. 437). He went on to give an example of an asylum seeker who was denied their petition in part because "her story did not fit'" (p. 437) with much of the critique of her petition centered

on her style of communicating. Vital decisions were being made about these petitions primarily on the basis of judgments about a narrative accounting of circumstances, which can unfortunately be influenced by the way stories are told.

Much research has been done on the effect that disparate Discourses have on students and teachers' abilities to connect during literacy activities such as Story Time. Michaels (1981) and Michaels and Collins (1984) found that in these key situations for enhancing students' literacy skills, there were major discrepancies between minority dialect speaker students and their dominant Discourse speaking teacher involved in the study. Opportunities for co-construction of storytelling narratives were lost when ill-timed questions and interruptions were made by the teacher in an attempt to help the students, stemming from a basic misunderstanding of the way in which these students were telling their stories. The teacher in the study negatively evaluated narratives presented by these students as "filibusters" (Michaels and Collins, 1984, p. 225) and "not *important* enough" (Michaels and Collins, 1984, p. 230, emphasis in original) due to the style of narration. Echoing sentiments from Scollon and Scollon (1984)'s White commenter on Athabaskan narratives being "cooked up", the teacher in Michaels' (1981) study similarly commented that certain students were talking "off the top of their heads, thinking up things to say as they [went] along" (p. 438).

Lest we believe that this is an isolated incident, restricted to one classroom in one region of the nation, Michales and Cazden (1986) replicated this same research across the country in four different classrooms in two different school districts. They found similar results in Boston, MA as they did in the original location of Berkeley, CA. Teachers who

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were generally considered to be competent, but did not share the same Discourse as their students were ill-equipped to help with narrative co-construction with students whose Discourses were not aligned with their own. Besides being unable to effectively assist, these teachers often had negative evaluations of the narratives and "often perceived these narratives as having no beginning, middle or end, and hence no point at all" (p. 137). These negative evaluations even led to teachers doubting the credibility of the narrators, with one teacher labeling a student whose Story Time sharing she found difficult to interpret a "tall tale teller" (p. 144).

Michaels and Cazden (1986) did further research into the phenomenon of adult evaluation of child narratives by playing tape-recorded versions of two children's Story Time sharing to adult listeners, which had been modified so as to obscure the race of the speaker. There was a strong correlation between the race of the adults, the original storyteller, and the assessed quality of the narrative. White adults were more likely to assess the white child's story more highly whereas "black adults were more likely to evaluate positively both topic associating and topic-centered stories - noticing differences but seeming to appreciate both" (p. 150). This supports Schleppegrell's (2004) assertion that, "what we value in language performance is deeply rooted in our own experiences with language, and these experiences vary by social class and ethnicity" (p. 40). Adults and teachers from the dominant Discourse's inability to understand the narrative style of students or children whose sociolinguistic backgrounds are different than theirs can have wide ranging consequences beyond the classroom. "If teachers fail to hear the structure or logic in a child's discourse, they are naturally inclined (as are we all) to assume it isn't there; that the talk is rambling,

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unplanned, or incoherent" (Michaels & Cazden, 1986, p. 151). This can have farther ranging consequences as these children leave the school system and deploy their storytelling resources in work environments with colleagues and supervisors who are potentially unequipped to understand or value their contributions.

This is of particular importance when a candidate is sitting across the interview table from a prospective employer who is not from the same background as him or herself. The results of this research imply that this mismatch in backgrounds can impact the way that the candidate's narrative is received, which in turn impacts how their fitness as a job candidate is judged.

In a job interview setting, how the speaker (job candidate) narrates their qualifications contributes, in part, to how their identity is perceived by their prospective employer. If a candidate is drawing on their home Discourse to narrate their experiences and qualifications but is doing so from a position that differs from the Discourse of that of the interviewer, it is likely that the candidate's narrative will not be positively evaluated by the interviewer. Despite having the qualifications and experience, the candidate may be unable to narrate that identity in a way that is understood and positively evaluated by the interviewer. The interviewer has inherent expectations of how the questions will be answered and "our evaluations of each other's communicative effectiveness are based on how well these expectations are fulfilled," (Gumperz et al., 1984, p. 5) thus potentially leading candidates who do not share a socioeconomic or linguistic background with the interviewer to be improperly evaluated. As demonstrated in Michaels and Cazden (1986), the adults who did not belong to the dominant Discourse were more able to appreciate linguistic variability and

see the merit in both styles of narratives, while the adults who belonged to the dominant Discourse did not see value in stories that were told outside of their own style. The researchers used stories that mimicked the Sharing Time stories from the studies described earlier, omitting indicators of class or race while maintaining rhythm and intonation, and played them for White and Black adult students at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. They asked these adults to give their opinion about how well formed the narrative was and then, based on these evaluations, to hypothesize as to the academic success of the storyteller. The White adults uniformly negatively evaluated the topic-associating stories told by Black students, finding them difficult to follow and incoherent; they estimated that these children were not successful at school. The Black adults found value in both the White students' topic-centered stories as well as the Black students' topic-associating stories. The study demonstrated that "it is harder to hear and appreciate the structure in discourse if it is not the kind of structure you are attuned to" (Michaels & Cazden, 1986, p. 151). Thus, candidates who share a narrative Discourse style will be positively evaluated, potentially receiving a more positive evaluation in the hiring process than their experience or qualifications would merit, while candidates whose narrative Discourse style is not a match will struggle for recognition of their fitness.

**The Job Interview**

Typically, the process of employment for entry-level administrative jobs across various fields follows a fairly standard course. The applicant applies for the position by supplying the prospective employer with a resume (or CV) as well as a cover letter explaining why the applicant is interested in the position and why they believe that they

would perform well in the position. These documents are vetted by someone in the organization (or increasingly by computers searching for key words) to determine whether the candidate merits a phone screening. Once the phone screening is conducted, if the candidate performs well, they are then moved to the next phase: the in-person job interview.

A job interview is a situation that allows us to see Gee's Discourse theory at work in a scenario that many adults have experienced and one that is usually emotionally heightened for the candidate seeking a job. "At any moment we are using language we must say or write the right thing in the right way while playing the right social role and (appearing) to hold the right values, beliefs, and attitudes" (Gee, 1989, p. 6). During an interview, special attention is paid to combination of self-presentation style, narrative style and mannerisms as employers attempt to assess how well each candidate would perform in the position and if they will fit in the culture of the company or organization. "All interviews are essentially artificial social situations in which candidates are asked to present the best version of themselves, all while pretending to *be* themselves" (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2018, p. 2, emphasis in original). This presentation extends beyond just the visual presentation to encompass speaking style and other Discourse markers.

This is especially true of the behavioral interview, which will be the interview type that is the focus of this research. Behavioral interviewing, which has become an increasingly popular style of interviewing (Behavioral interviews, 2002; Roulin & Bangerter, 2012; Powers, 2000), is characterized by questions that focus on potential employees' past behavior on the job in order to attempt to assess their future potential performance (Davis & Herrera, 2013). These interview questions "probe deeper into on-the-job experiences or actions"

(Powers, 2000, p. 672) ideally as they "relate to requirements of the job they are seeking" (Campion et al., 1997, p. 667) in order to use the information provided by candidates to "make better, more informed hiring decisions" (Davis & Herrera, 2013, p. 49) about the how the candidate would potentially behave or perform in the position that the company hopes to fill. The open-ended nature of these questions creates an emphasis on storytelling and narrative style.

Behavioral interviews tend to be similarly structured, with employers asking candidates to describe themselves and then asking questions that will require the candidate to narrate their past experiences on previous jobs in relation to a work-related theme, such as time management or conflict resolution. Each of these questions, though posed slightly differently, has a general structure that all successful answers, in the form of stories or narratives, will follow. The candidates will be asked questions that require them to "describe both positive and negative work situations they have encountered in the past . . . and be prepared to provide examples describing how a less than optimal situation was turned around for a positive outcome" (Powers, 2000, p. 674). Often these questions can be identified by prompts that begin with "tell me about a time", "describe a time" or "tell me about a situation." These prompts are the cue to the applicant that they need to provide a story from previous experience that will fit the scenario described.

In these types of interviews, "telling one's story well is critical to an applicant's success" (Ralston et al., 2003, p.8) and in order for the story to be considered "well-told" it must be formatted with specific components. The candidate's story for each question needs to be concise (Powers, 2000), "describe real actions taken in real circumstances" (Behavioral

interview, 2002, p.1), framed as "interesting and relevant" (Ralson et al., 2003, p. 11), particularly with "impressive outcomes as having been caused by one's actions" (Bangerter et al. 2014, p. 594), and "representative of the competency evaluated in the question" (Brosy et al., 2016, p. 4). Thus, this story must present the candidate in the most flattering light possible and show them to be the solution to the problem the company is looking to solve by hiring additional staff. All of these requirements are left to the judgment of the individual hiring manager or the panel of hiring managers present at the time of the interview. Candidates are then responsible to try to read the person(s) conducting the interview and supply a story that will fit their judgments of a good story. The consequences of not telling a story that fits these parameters can be serious as "interviewers can have negative perceptions when candidates' responses are ambiguous, lack descriptions and examples, not illustrating a process, making unsubstantiated claims and using irrelevant examples" (Lim et al., 2014, p. 13). All of these qualities are in the ear of the beholder and as Ralston et al. (2003) stress: not all hiring managers are "equally good listener[s]" (p. 20). or equipped sociolinguistically to understand the story.

Each candidate uses his or her answers (stories) to present a certain identity and hopes that the identity is acknowledged, understood, and positivity evaluated by the potential employer. It can be harder for candidates who are minority dialect speakers or English as a second language speakers for that identity to be acknowledged and to gain a positive evaluation than it is for their upper middle-class White counterparts whose mannerisms, speaking style and style of self-presentation would, due to their similarity, confer that positive evaluation. By downplaying differences and highlighting similarities (Bucholtz &

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Hall, 2004), with carefully constructed narratives these candidates hope to demonstrate their competency and capability with respect to the open position.

According to Bangerter et al. (2014), the narratives presented must be a "coherent" accounting of past job performance through a carefully constructed narrative that contains specific necessary components that engage the listeners to paint the candidate as the person who brought about a positive outcome in the type of scenario prompted, thus positioning themselves as the hero of the story. Whether or not a particular story is "coherent" is a judgment made by the listener, who may or may not share a cultural background with the storyteller (job candidate), and thus may have different criteria for what exactly constitutes a coherent narrative. Coherent in this case is judged by the standards of the White upper-middle class Discourse, which is often the standard Discourse used in the workplace regardless of the employees' affiliations to other Discourses.

Part of the reason that employers favor behavioral interviews and questions that fall under this category is that many believe that this method of interviewing actually reduces bias (Srinivasan & Humes, 2017). Interviewers believe that by asking these types of questions they can get more information than they would from skills-based or hypothetical interview questions (Davis & Hererra, 2013) and that it will be harder for candidates to misrepresent themselves and their skill set (Stoneman, 2000). However, research indicates that few interviewers receive appropriate training before starting the process (Davis & Herrera, 2013) thus using the interview to hire "from their own in-groups" (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2018, p.1) because they are not able to read the cues and characteristics of those from different groups (Lim et al., 2014). What these hiring managers fail to consider is that a

job interview is a genre, and because each cultural group will develop their own ways of structuring an answer within a genre due to the history and background of the group, (Kress, 1993) candidates from different backgrounds may have different strategies for organizing their answers to the questions posed to them in order to satisfy the genre requirements they believe it holds.

In these narratives, the burden falls on the interviewee to properly position him or herself as the model employee, one who embodies White upper middle-class characteristics valued in workplace settings. This positionality, defined by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) as the way that speakers construct their identities throughout the conversation based on the roles assumed by the participants within the interaction, means interviewees must also use certain language and structures to index certain identities considered desirable such as rationality, efficiency and collegiality while avoiding indexing identities that would potentially be negatively evaluated by the interviewer. The analysis of positionality and indexicality of the interviewees is taken up in the data analysis section of this paper.

Part of successfully positioning oneself as employable, especially for women, is to employ a bland niceness attributed to White culture (Trechter, 2001). Women face different behavioral expectations in the workplace than men (Acker, 1990; Blair-Loy, 2003; Nielsen, 2014; Tepper et al., 1993; Young, 2015; Young & Hurlic, 2007); there is the added necessity to be seen as warm and empathetic, as well as less competitive. These expectations, one can safely assume, apply to performance on a job interview, leading women to potentially downplay their achievements, avoid directly speaking about conflict in the workplace even

when asked, and positioning themselves as team-orientated and collegial. This will be explored further in the data analysis portion of this thesis.

A job interview, ideally, is an opportunity for an employer to become better acquainted with a candidate in order to decide whether to extend a job offer, while the candidate evaluates the potential job offer and place of employment for alignment with his or her long-term goals.  In reality, a job interview utilizing behavioral questions phrased as storytelling prompts can become a powerful sorting tool due to the devaluation of the various ways of telling stories that diverge from the prized dominant Discourse of upper-middle class White America. Employers who conduct interviews but have not been made aware of their own as well as societal bias, could unknowingly devalue the narratives of individuals that they interview whose discourse may be divergent from their own and turn away qualified candidates.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

**Participants**

Participants in this study were placed into two different groups: talent recruiters and student job seekers. The talent recruiters were talent recruiters and managers chosen from staffing agencies that operate within the Greater Boston area. These staffing agencies provide short- and long-term administrative job placements in various industries such as health care and higher education. The student job seekers were chosen from an education and job training non-profit that will be referred to as Boston Education & Training Services. These students fall into two different groups; one group of students were enrolled in a program to complete their high school diploma; the other group of students were enrolled in a college preparatory program.

The talent recruiters were a small, fairly homogenous group. Three of the four participants self-identified racially as White and female, while one participant self-identified as multiracial and male. All participants were born within the United States. The average age of the participants was 31 years old, and the average income was $67,000 per year once the highest outlier was removed, otherwise the average income per year was $112,000. Most of these participants spoke only one language: English, except for one multilingual talent

recruiter. All participants had obtained their bachelor's degrees from accredited institutions within the United States.

The student job seekers from Boston Education & Training Services were a much more diverse group. This group was comprised of a mix of individuals who were born in the United States and those that had immigrated to the United States as adults. The largest self-reported racial demographic was Black (ten participants), followed by Asian (six participants), White (three participants), Black/Latino (one participant), Latino (one participant), mixed (one participant). There were two participants who marked themselves as "other." Of the twenty-four candidates, seventeen self-identified as female and six as male. The average age of the participants was 37 years old, and the annual incomes ranged from $0 - $39,000 per year, with many participants only able to provide their hourly wage not an annual estimate. Most participants spoke more than one language, the average being three languages. Many participants received either high school diplomas or bachelor's degrees outside of the United States and were, through Boston Education & Training Services, trying to get credentials within the United States in order to obtain better jobs or to be able to continue working in the field in which they were working when they lived in their home country. Both groups of participants reside and work or study in the Greater Boston area.

**Instruments**

Data was collected via a structured interview and a self-reported demographic form (see Appendix) that candidates filled out before answering any interview questions. Candidates were asked to disclose their age, race/ethnicity, first language as well as number of languages they speak, their highest level of education, where they completed their highest

level of education and their annual income. Participants of the study from both groups filled out the same demographic form and answered the same questions in the same order. Interviews were recorded using a Sony ICD-UX560 handheld recorder, and then the interviews were transcribed.

In order to anonymize the responses, all participants in this study were given a code depending on which group they are affiliated with. The talent recruiters from various Boston-area staffing agencies when being quoted will be referred to as R plus a number, and because there were four talent recruiters they are listed as R1 – R4.  The interviewees from Boston Education & Training Services will be referred to as I plus a number, and because there were 24 interviewees they are listed as I1 – I24.

The structured interview consisted of three questions, asked to each participant in the same order, and was designed to resemble a typical behavioral job interview, a common interview type in the United States (Roulin & Bangerter, 2012; Powers, 2000; Behavioral interviews, 2002). Before beginning the interview, each candidate was instructed by the interviewer to pretend that they were applying for a job, that this was an actual job interview and to answer the questions to the best of their ability. The three questions asked of each candidate were as follows:

1. Tell me about yourself.

2. Tell me about a time that you needed to manage numerous competing responsibilities, how did you handle that?

3. Describe a time when you faced a conflict while working on a team, how did you and your team overcome the issue to be able to meet the objective?

The first question was chosen because this is a common way to open a behavioral interview (Skillings, 2011). This question allows the interviewer to get to know a little bit more about the interviewee and break the ice before the questions that require more narrative anecdotes are asked. It is also an early indication for the interviewer as to whether the candidate will pick up on and respond appropriately to the cues of the genre. With this question, the interviewer hopes to gain perspective on the candidate's education and work history as a way to assess their fitness – being perceived as a good worker and fitting into the workplace – and culture fit. Many interviewers also use the answer to this question to prime the questions that they will ask as the interview progresses.

The second question was constructed using the phrase "tell me about a time," which is a common storytelling prompt in behavioral interviews. The question then focuses on a skill that is valued in offices: time management. This question gives interviewees the opportunity to talk about their time management skills and provide an example or anecdote that establishes that they possess this skill.

The third question was constructed using the phrase "describe a time," which is another common storytelling prompt in behavioral interviews. The phrase "describe a time" was chosen instead of "tell me about a time" to see if these prompts would trigger differential rates of storytelling. That is, would interviewees read "describe a time" as a storytelling prompt more than "tell me about a time" and thus be more likely to provide an anecdote. This question gave interviewees the opportunity to talk about conflict resolution within teamwork. This question requires a bit more tact, as the interviewee must navigate giving an anecdote

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that presents a conflict without appearing to be at fault or without blaming coworkers. Doing either of these things would position the candidate as a less than ideal teammate or colleague.

Because these are simulated interviews, I selected the following questions that would approximate the anecdotal interactions realistic to job interviews. These are not actual interviews; however, these questions would generally fall into the genre of most behavioral interview questions (Davis & Herrera, 2013; Campion et al., 1997; Powers, 2000). There is a possibility that because there was not an actual job offer that would be proffered based on the results of the interview that interviewees would not provide genuine answers that they may have otherwise provided in an actual interview scenario. However, the candidates from Boston Education & Training Services attend classes at this institution in order to gain credentials and obtain employment in their chosen fields. Part of the training they are able to receive from this institute focuses on interview performance and obtaining employment in their chosen field. This simulated interview represented an opportunity to practice a skill, interviewing, that these candidates know they will need to perform well in order to obtain employment in these chosen fields. This leads me to believe that they will provide the best possible answer so that they can practice their answers and become more comfortable and confident in their answers for when they complete the program and then must do this in a real, high-stakes situation.

Participants for this study were recruited on a volunteer basis. The talent recruiters were recruited via email. The Boston Education & Training Services student job seekers were recruited on site at the Boston Education & Training Services site in downtown Boston. Announcements were made before and after their classes that students could participate

during their class break if they would like. No additional credit was given to students to incentivize their participation. Instructors did inform them that it was a good opportunity to practice their job interviewing skills. The consent form was written at a comprehensible level for this specific audience. Any additional explanations of the form were offered to the participants.

**Approach to Data Analysis**

In order to analyze the interviews, I utilized a combination of aspects from different frameworks. From Gee (1989, 2012), I framed my analysis of the narratives produced by the talent recruiters and the Boston Education & Training Services candidates on the concept that there are distinct Discourses into which each individual is sorted based on a combination of factors, such as race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, etc. Generally, the hiring managers of major companies, who are responsible for conducting interviews and bringing on new employees, belong to the White upper-middle class Discourse group, the group that sets the rules surrounding the appropriate register and structure of answers to interview questions. The talent recruiters were interviewed as example members of this group, while the Boston Education & Training Services candidates were interviewed as non-members of this Discourse group. While Gee's (1989, 2012) Discourse framework focuses on a "saying-doing" combination, in this thesis my focus is on the "saying" part of the equation, the way that members of the different discourse groups articulate their answers. From Scollon & Scollon (1984), Michaels (1981), Michaels & Cazden (1986), Michaels & Collins (1984), Blommaert (2001), and Gumperz (1992), I used their research to interpret how the White upper-middle class Discourse reacts to and interprets narratives whose formatting,

vocabulary and topic choices, and linguistic style do not match their own. This Discourse is "mainstream" and most utilized in the public sphere such as schools and offices, and because of its dominance and power, is often seen as unmarked (Gee, 2012). White upper-middle class Discourse is often seen as the homogenous standard for American English (Lippi-Green, 2011), whose unmarked features go unnoticed until a speaker from another Discourse uses their manner of speaking in a situation that calls for the use of this Dominant discourse, such as a job interview, making the differences pronounced. I also used Goffman's (1959, 1981) concept of footing to examine the ways the candidates positioned themselves while answering the interview questions.

In a job interview, displaying confidence and being able to give the impression of competence is vital to a successful outcome. The most effective way for an interviewee to do this is to *adequate* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004) their identity to mirror that of the dominant White upper middle-class values and identity that is associated with "economic status and higher education" (McIntosh, 2021, p. 2), "rationality and emotional control" (Brodkin, 2001, p. 148), enacting "individualistic behavior" (Trechter, 2001, p. 28), and which is "intellectual and technologically oriented, . . . homogenous and culturally bland" (Trechter & Bucholtz, 2001, p. 14). This Discourse, the "overarching, homogenous standard language, which is primarily Anglo, upper middle-class, and ethnically middle-American" (Lippi-Green, 2011, p. 68), is unmarked and thus considered the standard by which other identities and languages use are judged.

As Bucholtz and Hall (2005) assert, "identity emerges in discourse through the temporary roles and orientations assumed by participants" (p. 591). This is especially salient

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in a job interview, where both participants are well aware of their respective roles in the interaction and usually have little to no prior engagement with one another such that the locus of their relationship is formed throughout the turns of this specific interaction. Analysis of the way the interviewees present themselves in the way they construct their narrative answers to these storytelling interview prompts draws heavily on the principles of positionality and indexicality as described by Bucholtz and Hall (2005). In positionality, the "micro details of identity" (p. 591) of the interactional participants are built "moment by moment" (p. 591) within the conversation as these speakers "assume the temporary roles and orientations" (p. 591) of interviewer and interviewee, while also being situated within broader social categories such as race, gender or ethnicity. Indexicality is described as the process that creates "semiotic links between linguistic forms and social meanings" (Silverstein, 1985 as cited by Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p. 594), a process which "relies heavily on ideological structures" (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p. 594). Interviewees carry the burden of constructing an identity through the narrative answers they provide to the series of questions that are framed as storytelling prompts in order for the interviewer to gain a better sense of their identity as an employee or colleague. This data analysis section will examine how interviewees position themselves throughout the interaction as well as what language participants use to index an identity that either engineers "adequation" - "socially recognized sameness" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 383) or "distinction" - marked "partially or sufficient difference" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 384) of the model employee based on dominant White upper middle-class standards.

Though different pieces of each candidates' identity cannot be separated from each other during an interview where the candidate is assessed holistically, I examined how these individual pieces of identity, such as gender, race and L1, might be assessed when viewed through the lens of the dominant Discourse used in workplaces. These parts of identity can impact the way interviewers view a candidates' "feeling of another's knowing" (FOAK) (Brennan & Williams, 1995), the gendered performance of niceness and even the candidate's decisions about the length of narrative provided.

### *Influence of FOAK*

Many factors influence the "feeling of another's knowing" (FOAK) (Brennan & Williams, 1995), the judgment that the listener renders of the speaker's knowledge of the topic, which implies a judgment on their confidence when the questions do not have explicitly correct answers, such as in the case of a job interview. Use of hedging, filler words and pauses (Brennan & Williams, 1995; Smith & Clark, 1993; Swerts & Krahmer, 2005) can influence the way that the listener will evaluate the truth of what the speaker says as well as the speaker's conviction This is also true for answers that use more words (Swerts & Krahmer, 2005), which could be indicative of a less direct answer. This aspect of evaluating the speaker's level of certainty can be critical in job interviews where one is speaking about one's self, so evaluation of fact-based information takes a back seat to evaluating one's conviction and certainty, which essentially translates to confidence.

Several studies have been conducted to assess a speaker's level of confidence in their own answers as well as how listeners assess the speaker's level of knowledge in their answers. Smith and Clark's (1993) study focused on the speaker and their feeling of their

own knowing. They found that speakers who used hedges, filler words and pauses reported having a weaker feeling of their own knowing of the information they provided in their answers. Speakers who did not rely on hedges and whose answers were more direct considered themselves to have a higher knowledge of the answer. While Brennan and Williams (1995) focused on the way that listeners assess the speaker's answer for their level of knowledge, the listener's "feeling of another's knowing" (p. 383). Listeners in their study rated answers that were provided quickly and with fewer pauses as having a higher likelihood of the speaker being knowledgeable about the given answer while rating answers with long pauses and filler words as "less likely to be correct" (p. 395). Swerts and Krahmer (2005) found many of the same results as the two previous studies, while adding a visual component to their study where participants were filmed while answering questions and facial expresses were annotated. They found that while listeners can accurately predict FOAK without the use of visual cues, accuracy of the assessment of FOAK increased when assessing using audio and visual cues. Listeners still used filler words and pauses to make the determination of low FOAK ratings, but facial cues such as eyebrow movement or funny faces also increased likelihood of lower FOAK ratings. An interesting note is that in the Swerts and Krahmer (2005) study, answers that contained more words were rated a lower FOAK, while those with fewer words were rated higher, which can be interpreted to mean that more direct (economical) answers will be given a higher FOAK rating, while indirect (longer) answers will be given a lower FOAK rating. However, the first two studies were conducted using college students as volunteers while the third study was conducted using students as well as faculty/staff, and do not necessarily reflect the linguistics patterns across all Discourses.

There was no research done to measure whether speakers from different backgrounds appropriately assessed each other's FOAK.

None of these studies addresses the impact that being a foreign language speaker may have on the interpretation of FOAK by the listener. Brennan & Williams (1995) interviewed 62 students at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. There was no demographic information provided about the research subjects, so it is unknown if there were any English as an additional language speakers involved in the study and if so, if their responses received different reactions from the listeners. Similarly, the Smith & Clark (1993) study focused on 25 students who attend Stanford University and no demographic information about these subjects was provided. Swerts & Krahmer (2005) conducted interviews with 20 students at Tilburg University in the Netherlands. These interviews were conducted in Dutch and there was no information provided as to whether all the interviewees and listeners were native speakers of that language. None of the studies listed address how lapses may or may not be reacted to differently by listeners who are aware of the non-native speaking status of the speaker. Though there is research that indicates that speakers of the upper-middle class Discourse negatively assess speakers with non-standard accents (Bradae & Wisegiver, 1984; Kalin & Rayko, 1978; Kalin, Rayko & Love, 1980; Lippi-Green, 2011), perceived non-white ethnicity (Singer & Eder, 1988) or speakers of non-standard varieties of English (Blair & Conner, 1978; Cargile & Giles, 1998; Hopper, 1977; Hopper & Williams, 1973; Johnson & Buttny, 1982), there is no research specifically addressing how listeners may differentially interpret the FOAK of non-native speakers as they pause or use filler words. Based on the research that indicates prejudicial judgements leveled at candidates with 'ethnic' accents or

'non-standard' language use, it would stand to reason that these same prejudices may be leveled at English as additional language speakers who must pause or use fillers during their answers. Therefore, these dominant Discourse listeners could be generally assumed to assess the FOAK as lower based on the pauses or filler words.

While it is true that these factors can indicate that a candidate is not confident in their answer, there are many different reasons that could cause a person to use hedging words, pauses or filler words that do not have anything to do with the level of knowledge or certainty the candidate has in their answers. Individuals who may be answering questions in a language that is not their primary language can utilize pauses or filler words as a way to gain extra time to retrieve the word they are looking for. Women who do not wish to appear overly confident could use hedging phrases or use less direct phrasing as a way to appear more deferential based on societal expectations in the workforce (Nielsen, 2014; Tepper et al., 1993; Young, 2015; Young & Hurlic, 2007). Individuals who come from cultures where it is improper to show more knowledge than a superior could use hedging words to be more deferential towards that person of a higher social rank, for example, the interviewer in the case of a job interview. This is especially true in the context of an interview where answers require the candidate to take on the mantle of storytelling. In this case, the candidate must "maintain another footing, that of a narrator whose extended pauses and utterance completions are not to be understood as signals that he is now ready to give up the floor" (Goffman, 1981, p. 152) which can be uncomfortable for different groups who do not feel empowered to do so based on power dynamics of age or gender. This is especially relevant in job interviews where candidates are not in positions of power because of the inherent power

dynamics of asking for a job. These candidates may not feel comfortable taking the role of narrator, as the interviewer has the power to grant their petition or not and thus has the more powerful position in the interaction thus meaning that they do not have permission to take on the narrative mantle despite prompting.

**Gender and the Need for Niceness.**

Women often face different behavioral expectations than men in the workforce (Acker, 1990; Blair-Loy, 2003; Nielsen, 2014; Tepper et al., 1993; Young, 2015; Young & Hurlic, 2007), which would necessarily influence the structure of their answers to job interview questions. Women are socialized to be and are seen as more empathetic and less competitive than men (Nielsen, 2014) and are often times evaluated at work based on "perceptions of warmth" (Berdahl & Moon, 2013, p. 347) that lead to overall judgment of their likeability. There is evidence that stepping outside these expectations of gender performance in the workplace can have negative consequences on overall career success (Young & Hurlic, 2007). One can then safely assume, in light of this research, that stepping outside of these gender expectations during a job interview could hamper a candidate's possibility of being hired. The vast majority of individuals interviewed for this project were women; seventeen of the twenty-four candidates from Boston Education & Training Services and three of the four talent recruiters were women. In both groups, there is evidence of the use of hedging language, filler words, pauses and indirectness in their answers that mitigate the assertiveness of their answers in accordance with societal expectations of gender performance in the workplace.

*Women's Work*

The division of labor between domestic work and work outside the home breaks down along gender lines (Acker, 1990; Acker, 2006; Blair-Loy, 2003; Brines, 1994; Collins, 1994; Gerson, 2002; Hennessy, 2015). Domestic work typically involves care of the home, cooking and cleaning, as well as child and elder care (Acker, 2006; Blair-Loy, 2003; Collins, 1994; Gerson, 2002) and falls primarily on the shoulders of women despite an increase in the number of women entering the workforce (Blair-Loy 2003; Brines, 1994; Gerson, 2002).

Blair-Loy (2003) conducted research on women in high-level executive positions and determined that there are two schemas: family devotion and work devotion. These schemas are all encompassing, making it difficult to participate in both at the same time. The "schemas are the shared cultural models we employ to make sense of the world. These schemas are frameworks for viewing, filtering, understanding, and evaluating what we know as reality. Constructed by societies over time, they gradually become largely unquestioned" (Blair-Loy, 2003, p. 5). The family devotion schema positions women as the person responsible for home and family, while the work devotion schema assigns the responsibility of earning and providing financially for his family to men. There is pressure both within work culture as well as socially to adhere to these gendered-schemas as "people in gender-atypical partnerships often encounter negative judgments from relatives, friends, and colleagues" (Brines, 1994, p. 664).

Gerson (2002) posits a slightly different conclusion of motivation behind these gendered roles, but with the same end results. She states that society positions men and women in two distinct moral categories, where women are expected to "seek personal

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development by caring for others, and men to care for others by sharing the rewards of independent achievement" (p. 8). Essentially women are morally responsible for the work of household maintenance and childcare, while men are morally responsible for working outside the home for financial gain that supports the family. While Acker (1990) claims that it is the logic and structure of hierarchical organizations that creates a "disembodied worker . . . whose life centers on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and children" (p. 149). In doing so, this organizational concept of what constitutes a "universal worker excludes and marginalizes women, who cannot, almost by definition, achieve the qualities of a real worker" (p. 150) because of their "identification with childbearing and domestic life" (p. 152).  The structure of how organizations identify what a worker is positions women in the home.

### *Permission to Speak Freely*

Job interviews are specific scenarios in which an interviewer or group of interviewers will make judgments about a candidate's capabilities, skills and fitness for a position based in large part on the way the candidate narrates their experiences and qualifications. The candidate must present himself or herself via storytelling to better contextualize and flesh out the information bullet points on their resume. The expectation of the interviewer is that the candidate will provide answers that contain anecdotes that explain how they reacted to varied workplace situations at prior jobs such as time management, conflict on a team, communication, and other themes. These anecdotes in the mind of the interviewer help to gauge how the candidate would handle any of these types of situations that might arise in their new place of employment (Bangerter et al., 2014; Ralston et al., 2003). Through this

narrative, the candidate also hopes to impress upon the interviewer that they will be a "good fit" at the office, meaning that they will fit in well with the established culture there as well as have the requisite jobs skills to effectively execute the position. These anecdotes then serve a secondary function, allowing the interviewer to see how well the candidate will "fit" into the established office culture.

Sharing a similar background with the interviewer is a powerful way that candidates can both look and speak the part of a good fit for the position. This shared background can be examined through the lens of Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and social capital (1984, 1986). Cultural capital, as described by Bourdieu (1984, 1986) explains the ways that "cultural artefacts [sic] and knowledge were brought into play alongside basic economics, in the dynamics of social class relations" (Gauntlett, 2011, p. 2) and allows us to critically examine these factors. Social capital, "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119) can create either a sense of shared characteristics or create a social and cultural barrier between interviewers and the candidates. Candidates who share a cultural background can use that shared cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) to organize their answer and provide an explanation of suitable length and structure; a well-formed anecdote that is not too short that it undersells the candidate and his or her skills and not too long that is appears meandering and becomes less compelling as it gets harder to follow. The candidates who lack the same cultural and social capital as the interviewers are at a disadvantage. They may not be aware of the unwritten rules of how best to present their narratives so that they can present themselves as a good fit.

Job interviews that rely on behavioral questions present a situation where individuals will need to take extended narrative turns in order to fully answer the question prompts. Candidates with different cultural backgrounds may either misread the signal that they are being encouraged to take on an extended narrative turn or may be uncomfortable doing so. Hall (1994) problematizes the notion of culture being viewed as a fixed part of an individuals' identity by identifying two different ways to view culture. The first positions culture and cultural identity as something that can " reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning" (p. 223) while the second looks at cultural identity as "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. " (p. 225) These cultural codes can influence the way and amount that individuals cooperate (Gachter et al., 2010), the amount of speaking individuals feel is appropriate (Trechter, 2001) and how comfortable an individual feels in suspending normal back and forth exchanges to take extended turns during an interaction (Goffman, 1959; Goffman, 1981). It is important to avoid essentializing cultures and broadly applying stereotypical characteristics to candidates based on their appearance or name, while also being sensitive to the fact that individuals from different cultural backgrounds may react differently to the prompts.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

**Influence of FOAK**

Several candidates paused and used filler words throughout their answers. Would

interviewers then rate these interviewees with a lower FOAK thus weakening their

impression of the candidate or would they simply interpret them as struggling to fully

understand the question or find the right words the candidate was looking for in a second

language? In Question 1, tell me about yourself, some Boston Education & Training Services

candidates utilized frequent pauses and filler words while listing various characteristics and

describing their skills and strengths. This could be a detriment for candidates, as the first

question is asking them to narrate their skills and strengths as well as their career trajectory.

Because this question is about self-description, a candidate giving the impression of

uncertainty could be cause for an interviewer to doubt their confidence in their own skills.

For example, candidate I1, paused frequently and uses "um" and "uh" many times between

each characteristic he used to describe himself.

> I1: Uh, very uh, motivated, uh team player, um self, I I would say self-motivated,
>
> (pause 1 second) um hard worker, um (noise with lips) I like to, uh, learn and I like to
>
> advance in my position, um, these are the qualities that I, uh, bring to work, uh,

myself is um, I guess myself, infos about myself um I'm just um friendly and um, I

will say, uh, um, intellectual.

How would the FOAK of this candidate be evaluated by a hiring manager based on this answer? Would the filler words cause the interviewer to doubt I1's assessment of himself as a worker or would the interviewer interpret this as a person struggling to find the proper words to describe themselves in a second language? Would the combination of factors, the filler words, the pauses and the fact that this answer does not fully satisfy the question be cause for a hiring manager to doubt the candidate's confidence? The qualities that candidate I1 has identified are qualities that many companies prefer their employees possess, which should merit a positive evaluation of this candidate if the interviewer positively evaluates this answer as confident and thus truthful.

Another candidate, I3, struggled to articulate her work experience without frequent use of filler words.

I3: ok, so, um I'm I3, um (pause 1 second), then then I, I have experiences in on jewelry, and on (pause 1 second) computer you know, on mmmm, I mean, multimedia services, and then and about um repairing, about (sharp intake of breath) um being sales associate, uh, about (pause 1 second) yeah mostly that's it.

Her answer shows a variety of experiences in different industries, which can be an asset in some positions, but fails to narrate a career path. This lack of chronological organization coupled with the frequent use of "um" and "uh" could be interpreted as a lack of confidence in her answer, thus leading the interviewer to doubt her fitness for the position.

Answers to Question 2 in the interview relate to time management and the ability to prioritize tasks when there are multiple assignments in process at the same time. The ability to self-manage time is a valuable skill, and vital to demonstrate during this answer. Candidates whose answers have many pauses, filler words and hedges may lead the interview to have a lower sense of FOAK and thus distrust their narrative putting their ability to manage their own time effectively into doubt. Candidate I2 relies on filler words and pauses during her answer:

> I2: Um, the time or the condition that I had mmmmmm many responsibilities is my ac- my actual um time, which is work and home responsibilities and education, and I try to (pause 1 second) to separate each one from the other and give, give each one its time, the right time to to fix it and to do it well, (pause 1 second) um so I I I have choosen, in my schedule I have choosen three days which is part time as my work, and I give, I gave the prior-, priority for education because it's for my future career.

Her answer describes the current responsibilities she is balancing and how she decides to divide her time between them which is at the heart of the question. However, the frequent pauses and filler words, as well as the stammering could cause the interviewer to doubt her confidence in time management instead of interpreting it as someone potentially struggling to narrate all her responsibilities and using these pauses and fillers to find the right words.

Candidate I13 narrates a strategy of choosing tasks by importance then by due date. This strategy may not get a positive evaluation due to the pausing and filler words, which could make the interviewer doubt her answer.

I13: many, mmmm at first I choose the most important, to do that, yes, mmm and

then uh (pause 2 seconds) and then uh, depend, depends on the, depends on the uh

which one I should like finish first, yeah I will complete this and then uh then uh pick

this and then uh continue this step, yeah.

This answer could be interpreted by the interviewer as lacking confidence in her ability to

multitask or be chalked up to the fact that the candidate is struggling to articulate,

specifically, which steps she would take to manage the competing priorities.

Candidate, I1, chooses to narrate an anecdote that both demonstrates time

management as well as people and resource management. These skills are usually desirable

in candidates that companies are looking to hire. This anecdote, though, is filled with filler

words, which could lead the interviewer to rate his FOAK lower and not be confident that the

candidate actually has these skills.

I1: It was a time that I was, uh, doing, uh some construction and, uh, I had multi

workers in there and I had to, um, schedule them and uh, organize them and it was, uh

it was pretty complicated, it was hard to do, but I um I think I did well, I, um, I

managed to communicate with all of them, synchronize them, in a way that the job

got done, in a very uh, um, timing matter.

Coordinating workers and strategically deploying them to meet deadlines is an impressive

skill for a candidate to have and should make him a desirable candidate. The reliance on

frequent pauses may undercut the interviewer's interpretation of the candidate's fitness, by

lowering the interviewer's confidence in his answer.

Because Question 3 deals with conflict in the workplace, a delicate topic, the interviewer might give more leeway for pauses and filler words as candidates work to navigate the words they choose for their answers. The interviewer may also hear the fillers and pauses used by the candidate and lose confidence in their answer as well as their ability to manage conflict in the workplace. I4 narrates a conflict he had with a coworker when he was new on the job:

> I4: uh, in my work, uh, in the beginning, (pause 1 second) my coworker and me, we had uh, a misunderstanding, um (pause 1 second) because (pause 1 second) I was new employee, and, uh, he liked to give me order, uh, any time, so he's my coworker, he was my coworker, not my boss, so one day, I called on him and I spoke with him, I let you, I let him, let he know, uh, the situation, eh, it's an improper situation, so, if he want, he want, he could uh, talk to me, uh, this situation is not uh, show me, uh a person, uh as a boss because he's not a boss, so basically was a communication um (pause 1 second) situation problem situation, and after weeeee, I spoke with him about the situation, the problem, ah, was solved, and we become a a a good friends and a good coworkers.

This situation is a good illustration of a common conflict in the workplace between colleagues. The candidate explains the issue, the steps he took to resolve it, and the end result of his intervention. This answer fits the format for an ideal answer (Bangerter et al, 2014) where the candidate is the one who positively resolves the situation. However, the frequent filler words may create doubt in the interviewer's mind as to the confidence this candidate has in his answer and his ability to resolve situations like these.

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Candidate I11 has a similar anecdote about a conflict with a colleague at work. He narrates the answer confidently until the section where he describes the resolution to the issue. His anecdote contains few fillers, pauses or hedges for most of the narration until he arrived at the end of the anecdote, the frequent pauses at this juncture of the narrative could leave the interviewer doubting the details surrounding the resolution of the issue.

> I11: yeah, I remember one time, when I just came here United State, I I start I use to I start to work in Dunkin Donuts, so I remember one day, it was too busy, I was working just with one colleague, well we were just two people, so and we receive a customer, he was, he did an order online, so we didn't see it because we are too busy, one the cashier and the register and one sandwich station, so we didn't see that, so when the customer, he was he was too angry because we didn't make, we didn't make his order on time, so, he was complaining, he was to (pause 1 second) to made a frown on his on his face, so I didn't what to say to him, to say to him, so so my coworker, he doesn't care he was working with the other customer so I tried to overcome the problem by, by give to the other cust- to the customer, a gift or something, (pause 2 seconds) but I would like just to (makes noises) I can't (makes noises) the situation out, (pause 2 seconds) so my colleague doesn't like to help me to to solve this solution, he was, you know, it was other country, other culture, he doesn't like to help me, so I like to make the customer happy, so I gived him (pause 2 seconds) half dozen donuts free.

The beginning of the narration sets the table for the conflict and why it occurred; here there are no pauses or filler words. It is not until the candidate arrives at the resolution do we see

his narration falter a little. He takes several two-second pauses, he makes noises between narrative phrases, which could be interpreted in many ways. The candidate could have been trying to think of the specific words to narrate the options he was considering, or he could be searching for the appropriate phrases to not betray too much frustration with his colleague, thus not appearing to be a team player. It is also true that the candidate could be struggling to narrate a delicate situation in a second language and needs extra time to search for the vocabulary he feels is appropriate. These pauses though, may lower the FOAK the interviewer has and cause this person to doubt the resolution of the story itself and by extension this candidate's ability to manage this type of conflict. This issue needs to be addressed in terms of the interviewer's interpretation of the interviewee's positionality as either a universalized interviewee or the position as an additional language speaker. Previous research has shown interviewer prejudice against speakers with accents or speakers of non-standard English (Blair & Conner, 1978; Bradae & Wisegiver, 1984; Cargile & Giles, 1998; Hopper, 1977; Hopper & Williams, 1973; Johnson & Buttny, 1982; Kalin & Rayko, 1978; Kalin, Rayko & Love, 1980; Lippi-Green, 2011; Singer & Eder, 1988) which bodes ill for additional pauses and fillers that may be needed by interviewees whose first language is not English, that would represent an additional step away from normative language performance.

In a job interview where the analysis of the narrative of a candidate is one of the primary ways that interviewers assess their fitness, candidates must choose their words carefully to craft an appropriate and desirable answer. This may occasionally lead candidates to use filler words, pauses and hedges while constructing their narratives for several reasons, to buy time while trying to choose the appropriate vocabulary or to think about exactly how

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to order the narrative, among other reasons. However, overreliance on pauses, hedges and fillers may cause the interviewers to doubt the narratives the candidates provide and lower their feeling of FOAK, thus negatively impacting their assessment of the candidate.

*Gender and the Need for Niceness.*

**Talent Recruiters Responses to Question 1.**

Of the three women who currently work as job recruiters, two of them made frequent use of hedges and filler words throughout their answers. The most common hedge used was the word "kinda" or "kind of." It appeared prominently in the answers of both candidates R1 and R2. Candidate R1 begins her answer to the first question of the interview with the filler word "uh" continues with an elongated "so" and a long pause.

> R1: Uh. Soooo . . .  a (pause 2 seconds) little bit about me, um, let's see, I guess I graduated from Boston University in 2008, uuummm, and really most of my career has been here at Hollister, um, I actually came to them looking for a job and aaahh, it was right in the middle of the recession, and, uh, there wasn't much out there, so I basically did temp work, anywhere and whatever they needed whether it was reception or data entry, um after about a year and a half of that, they were like what do you think  about doing recruiting, um, you've worked in most of our clients so, I decided to jump in and uh try recruiting and it stuck and here I am eight years later, uumm, now managing theee, uh, the recruiting team, so.

This is not a very confident start to an interview. She restates a fragment of the question and says "I guess I graduated from Boston University in 2008 . . ." The hedge "I guess" here is not necessary. She should know whether or not she graduated, what year and

from where, and as a recruiter she should be aware that education background is an important component in a strong answer to this particular interview question (Skillings, 2011). Her use of this hedge sets the tone for the rest of her answer for question one, as she frames herself as having fallen into the current position she has almost by accident. She narrates the process of obtaining the job as a department lead as if it was partly because of the economy and partly because she was there, not because she was excited about the field or had worked her way up from a much lower position to a position of authority within her department. This use of indirect phrasing could be part of a larger strategy to be deferential in an appeal to likeability (Berdahl & Moon, 2013). In this interview question, she should lead with the accomplishment that she is currently managing a team of recruiters but instead she downplays her obtaining a degree and working to obtain this job. The answer is peppered with "uh"s and "um"s that further reduce a potential job interviewer's FOAK of this particular candidate.

Candidate R2 employs similar use of "um", "uh", and "kind of" throughout her interview. Her answer to the first question is much more confident as she doesn't use hedging words to undercut her experience or accomplishments despite the fact that her answer is peppered with "um" and "uh." She is direct about what she is looking for in a new opportunity.

R2: So, my name is [R2], I am a recruiter at [redacted], um, I'm currently looking for, um, a new role, um, just because of some leadership changes within the organization, and I would like to, um, find an opportunity to really use my strengths in organization

and project (pause 1 second) management, um, to excel myself into that next level in

my career.

Despite being direct about her goals, the pauses and "ums" and "uhs" might somewhat

undercut that the sense of confidence an interviewer will have in the candidate's answer.

In contrast, the male talent recruiter (R3) provided much more direct answers, which

appear to be more confident answers to the questions. Overall, he used far fewer hedges so

despite using some pauses and filler words, his answers seem to be more direct in

comparison to the other candidates, especially R1 and R2. This would lead to an interviewer

assessing his answers more favorably. For example, candidate R3, discusses his

qualifications and experiences without equivocation. Instead of providing a meandering

narrative about how he came to have the job he has making it seem accidental, he provides a

road map of the accomplishments and credentials that have gotten him to this point in his

professional career.

> R3: I am a (pause 1 second) managing director for a uh small, privately owned
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> staffing firm, uh been in the staffing industry for about 10 years, went to work at the
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> United States military academy before that for four years um as a project manager
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> and a quality uh control manager as well and then graduated from Bryant University
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> in 2008 with a degree in Business Management with a double major in Marketing and
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> a minor in Communications.

**Talent Recruiters Responses to Question 2.**

Candidate R1 continues similarly in her answer to the second question, "tell me about a time that you needed to manage numerous competing responsibilities. How did you handle that?" peppering the answer with "uh", "um" and "kinda."

> R1: I´m huge about kinda dividing out what needs to be done by the end of the day and maybe what needs to be done by the end of the week, uuumm, and, yeah, just my organization is  (pause 1 second) a little chaotic to probably most people that look at my desk but for me it's, uh, you know, a lot of paper and notes um and a big like flagger right now in Outlook email as well too soo.

She describes an organizational system she uses to manage the numerous competing responsibilities and gives an anecdote that displays her abilities, but then undercuts herself when she closes by saying, "uuumm, and, yeah, just my organization is a little chaotic to probably most people that look at my desk but for me it's, uh, you know, a lot of paper and notes um and a big like flagger right now in Outlook email as well too soo . . " Using notes on a desktop or sticky notes as a way to organize as well as functions within the Outlook program are systems of organization that are utilized by many people. Specifically using the feature in Outlook shows a competency with that program in general, which is a good skill to have in any field that requires administrative tasks to accomplish larger goals. There is no reason for this candidate to downplay her abilities in an interview considering that the point of the interview is for her to highlight these types of skills, especially in a question about organization. This answer highlights the idea that in order to appear less intimidating, this candidate is adjusting her story to position herself to seem less competitive and more

accessible, as is the societal expectation in the United States. This positioning indexes the traditional view of White, upper middle-class women as nice, kind, and accommodating to others (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Nielsen, 2014).

Candidate R2 starts her answer to the second question by using hedging words that downplay her confidence in her answer:

R2: Yeah, I mean, I think in the current role that I'm in now there are a lot of, ah, situations where there can be a lot going on at one time, um, and so kind of keeping myself super organized and writing things down and using my calendar and the database that we use to keep myself really task oriented, um, just so I know exactly what needs to be done for that day and keep moving on, um and just kind of overcommunicating with my colleagues and my manager to make sure that we're all on the same page.

As the only person occupying her current role, she should be able to say "In my current role" instead of hedging by using "I think" as if she is not entirely sure. This hedging undercuts the seriousness and importance of her words. Daily, she is responsible for connecting people who are looking for positions with companies who are looking to solve an employment gap and finding a good fit that will make both the employee and the company happy. It is difficult to parse the seriousness and delicate nature of this type of work from her answer.

**Talent Recruiters Responses to Question 3.**

In her answer to the third question, describe a time when you faced a conflict while working on a team. How did you and your team overcome the issue to be able to meet the obligation?", candidate R1 uses hedging language like "kinda" to blunt the directness in

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statements that require dealing with unpleasantness.

> R1: there's a- definitely been a lot of conflicts, with like temp employees, whether it's employees wanting, you know, more money or not being happy in their role or wanting a job to go perm, so, you know, I can think of, you know, one sp-specific example we had, um, a temp who thought that, you know, at the three month mark they were going to go permanent and when really there's no signed agreement that at 90 days they're going permanent, and came to us three months in being like, I wanna go perm now, or you know, you promised me this, and so, yeah, so for us it was definitely um, and it, by us I mean like the account manager that worked with the client cuz the client obviously didn't want them to leave, and then also the recruiter who was like, did I say the right thing? you know, did I do this? or did I, you know, did I say that? so (pause 1 second) um (pause 1 second) really what we did and just kinda went back to like the basics of communication and that's kind of what I bring a lot back to is just overcommunicating, so this all started out in a big email that was, you know, kinda seemed nasty in the correspondence, um, and what we did was set up a call, um just got on a call with her to talk through ok this is really what the process is, like, you know, I'm sorry if you misunderstood that, there is no signed contract and once we were really able to get on the phone with her, she did kind of understand and calm down a little bit, um, but to her credit did help us kinda get a kick in the butt to the client, and went to them and just said, hey she's really interested, is this something, you know, that's going to happen soon and, um, it, it was, we waited another month or so, but then she did end up going permanent, so,

uuuum, yeah, so that was definitely, we thought it was going to be a crisis, but um

turned out to be, again kinda going back to that communication and just hopping on

the phone instead of just communicating through email goes a long way.

The example she gave about managing a temp who became extremely impatient with

her placement not moving towards a permanent position illustrates her use of hedging

language to avoid describing an unpleasant situation in direct terms. She described the

scenario "so this all started out in a big email that was, you know, kinda seemed nasty in the

correspondence," and said that the situation "did help us kinda get a kick in the butt to the

client," With this hedging she is able to sidestep more direct language that she would perhaps

be more likely to deploy in a different context, such as with colleagues or subordinates. She

emphasizes that the email "seemed" nasty but does not definitively label it as such, avoiding

making the temp look bad and explains that the client got a "kick in the butt" thus further

exculpating the temp without directly blaming the client either. This highlights the

candidate's need to appear approachable, empathetic and warm, (Berdahl & Moon, 2013;

Nielsen, 2014) even in situations that are by nature unpleasant and can require decisive

handling that may not be amenable to all parties.

Interestingly, in candidate R2's answer to the third question, she also uses "kind of"

to hedge around an unpleasant situation "instead of kind of being passive aggressive or

having a hostile situation, um," which undercuts her position and de-emphasizes the actual

issue at hand.

R2: I think that when it comes to coming up with new processes for the better of the

team sometimes there can be differing, um, opinions in terms of what people think is

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best, um, so I think really keeping open dialogue and communication with, um, my colleagues and the people around me to kind of hear everybody out and hear what they want, um, and the reasons why can keep it at least, um, a pretty civil situation instead of kind of being passive aggressive or having a hostile situation, um, so really just overcommunicating and listening to other people is super important.

She deploys "kind of" to blunt the unpleasantness that is a part of what her job manages when dealing with clients on both sides: firms who need placements and temporary employees who need jobs. There are bound to be situations where either side, the temp being placed or the organization receiving the temp, are unhappy. She avoids any language is that directly negative to describe the situation, that one can infer was probably stressful for at least some of the parties involved, including the interviewee. This narrative choice maintains her appearance as a warm and empathetic person, which is vital for women in the workplace (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Nielsen, 2014), despite the fact that it is her actual job to adjudicate these differences in needs and expectations. In order to maintain a socially appropriate appearance, she must, in her answer, hedge and avoid directly naming the way in which she deals with these conflicts and some of the more negative outcomes they can inspire.

Without the constraints of likeability or the need to be deferential, male candidate R3 can focus on presenting a fairly linear accounting of the education and work experience that have led him to be in this upper management position. Unlike the female talent recruiters, who either downplayed their accomplishments or glossed over them all together, this candidate asserts his qualifications. The gendered difference becomes even more apparent in R3's answer for Q3 about dealing with conflict in the workplace.

R3: uh yeah conflicts are something that, in the people industry, you come across all the time because we are in the business of people, one of the most uncertain commodities that you can possibly sell um so uh conflict resolution is a huge part of our training and part of our just internal processes so uh for instance uh what I just mentioned before, having to terminate a contractor from our assignment um, they may not be pleased with the reason for um that position uh being eliminated and the recruiter that is associated with them may also disagree, so in a team setting, as a manager or just as a team player maybe on the sales side who's working directly with the client, um, you have to be able to effectively communicate the reasons why and make sure that the team's on the same page, they, they may not agree but at least need to know why we're doing what we're doing and then make sure that we appropriately handle the communication therein so the conflict resolution piece is is huge uh, especially in the staffing space and dealing with contractors at all levels, and this could be from anyone who's entry level um doing data entry job all the way up to a CFO, who's just contracting for an interim solution basis.

Without any hesitation, this candidate starts the question by directly stating that conflicts happen regularly at his job. With confidence he then details how his business and department in particular deal with conflicts that arise. He then goes on to describe the types of conflicts that might arise and who in the office may be upset about decisions he is making. He does so without hedging, without equivocating and without using euphemisms to avoid directly speaking about it. He notably also does not use apologetic language to try to make excuses or apologize for the decisions that he must make, even though they potentially upset

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others in the office or contractors. Freed from the constraints of likeability, this candidate can describe his work and give examples of conflict without dancing around the topic to avoid offending the interviewer or appearing to behave in a manner that is inconsistent with the expectations for his gender. This candidate does utilize filler words frequently throughout his answer, which could undercut his FOAK, however he probably will not be negatively assessed by the interviewer specifically for his direct address of conflict in the workplace.

The responses for the interviewees from Boston Education & Training Services were different in content but not necessarily different in use of strategy. The seventeen women that were interviewed who were students at Boston Education & Training Services used fillers and pauses differently than those of the talent recruiters as well as avoiding direct phrasing on unpleasant issues. While both the groups of women employ filler words like "um" and "uh", the women in the Boston Education & Training Services group never use the hedge "I guess" and almost never use "kind of" or "I think." Instead, they employ different strategies to appear deferential and likable in their answers.

**Boston Education & Training Services Responses to Question 1.**

The first question of the interview asks the candidate to describe themselves. In response to the first prompt, a few candidates use fillers "um" and "uh" as they search for the right words to describe themselves in a manner that is congruent with the societal workplace expectations of women to be likeable. Candidate I8 chose words that all revolve around likability. "I am kind (pause 2 seconds) um, (pause 3 seconds) gentle, that's the same thing? and then I like to help people, um (pause 1 second) friendly."

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She frames herself as someone that you would want to work with, not based on her skills but on her personal characteristics. Another candidate, I22 follows a similar framing strategy. She relies on personal characteristics, not accomplishments or title. "Tell me about myself, um, (pause 1 second) I think I am patient and I like to just small one like a pickle, uh (pause 3 seconds) I don't know."

I22's answer is interesting in that she chooses patient, which is a characteristic that many different jobs require from employees. However, her reference to her being small like a pickle is a little bit harder to interpret. Did she choose small because ideally women are not meant to take up much space and she is referencing that? Do pickles hold a different cultural significance for someone from her cultural background that an American interviewer, such as myself, might not understand how to interpret? Whatever the answers are to those questions, her response is focused on her presentation of self, not her accomplishments or skills.

Another candidate, I18, also uses pauses and fillers to think and provide a non-assertive answer. However, she chooses to frame her skills as well as her personality.

I18: Hi, my name is (redacted) um, (pause 1 second), um, (pause 1 second) I don´t know, *laughs* um, ah, the skills I, um, like to do is work on a computer, I'm a people person, um, *laughs* . . . I don't know, I'm outgoing.

Her pauses and her bursts of laughter highlight how uncomfortable she is answering this question about herself. She also chooses two characteristics that would lead to likeability in the workplace. Her pausing and laughter would lead the interviewer to have a lower assessment of her FOAK, especially when it comes to her self-assessment of skills. The one skill she discusses, doing work on the computer, can be valuable when interviewing for an

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administrative position. However, she talks about liking it instead of getting more specific about the types of things she can do, such as which types of programs she uses.

Interviewees I8, I22 and I18 all rely heavily on fillers and pauses while trying to figure out how to frame themselves in their responses to the first question. They all choose to highlight characteristics that showcase likeability and not skills, achievements or professional goals. This could be because they cannot think of skills, achievements or professional goals to highlight in the moment, though this seems unlikely as they are currently enrolled in the programs at Boston Education & Training Services to build skills and thus have things that they could bring up based on that experience. More likely it is that these candidates feel that it is in their best interest in order to be hired to present themselves as likeable candidates to increase their ability to get hired. Their pauses and fillers may cause the interviewer to doubt their sincerity or their confidence in their answers thus rating them with lower FOAK.

**Boston Education & Training Services Responses to Question 3.**

Question 3 of the interview presents a problem for candidates in that it asks specifically about conflict in the workplace and asks them to narrate specific example of how the candidate handled the conflict. This can be especially challenging for women facing likeability constraints (Berdahl & Moon, 2013). In this case, candidates must find a way to bring up a workplace conflict they were involved in or witnessed but still be seen as likable at the conclusion of their answer. Here the fillers, pauses and hedges can be used by candidates to buy time to think about how exactly to balance the information in their answer and frame it within the constraints mentioned above. At the same time, these pauses and fillers can be interpreted as lack of confidence in their answer. The candidates use a variety

of strategies to avoid losing the appearance of likeability while appearing competent and capable of resolving the conflict.

> I3: so, the first thing is, that, and have to understand each other especially (pause 1 sceond) shhh, um, I should know for example if it's me, so I should know uh what other people feel, what they want, and I understand and then then, um I have to, but, uh, think from the point of positive way, so that (pause 1 second) and then, there is the, when we another thing is, um is not as a team, I, it's not, it depends on the team, right? so, it cannot be only me, so everybody should be balance, right? so, to be balance is like everybody need to (pause 1 second) um, (pause 1 second) they, they should have a will to, to uh, adjust the situation and uh, and uh, um, the, the target, the goal, the goal should be same, if they are opposite, cannot work together, right? so, it's firstly um, (pause 1 second) the goal they target should be same target same goal so that everybody can work together, if their goal is different, it's hard to deal with each other, and another thing is, um, the attitude, so some are negative some are positive thought, they cannot be together, they will always go against each other, so if that's situation happens, so not easy to be successful.

In this answer, the candidate uses many strategies to avoid directly speaking about negative experiences or conflict as well as strategies to appear more likable and build solidarity. The frequent pauses allow for careful selection of words and framing of the answer. By asking the interviewer "right?" throughout the interview, the candidate is seeking approval and attempting to build solidarity. She also states that the weight of these decisions or conflicts "cannot only be her" and that it "depends on the team." This appeal for solidarity

and viewing of a team as responsible allows her to shift the blame for any negativity off of herself directly and share it with the other members of the team.  These attempts would build the candidates image as likable and a team player, as well as deferential to authority, which are characteristics that are expected of women in the workplace (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Nielsen, 2014; Young & Hurlic, 2007). The candidate also avoids offering explicit strategies for dealing with colleagues who have a negative attitude merely saying that it is "not easy to be successful" when dealing with these individuals. By not offering a solution, especially one which might involve unpleasant consequences or strong actions, the candidate can present a likable and easy to work with countenance. These features may play well with the interviewer who has these expectations of female candidates, but they will also lower the interviewer's FOAK. The tradeoff though is that she may not appear to be decisive.

Another candidate who used a similar strategy was I12. She used many filler words and avoided describing a direct conflict with colleagues.

I12: um, in a team, um (pause 5 seconds) first to, first erhm um, figure out how I think they're, how I think about their object and um how I think it, their, um what is the best best way to to to do it, and and then listen list to others to understand um what they think and to find out um, know same same opinion between us and try to to do it together, um um if I I think um, their opinion is better than me I I I would use their method, and if I think my my me method is better I will persuade them to use mine or we can uh or we can find out our our best ways between us. then we we we can find out the best way, the best method.

This is a strategic answer that avoids directly addressing what would happen if the candidate thought her idea was the best idea, but her colleagues did not agree. Instead of indicating that she would advocate for her position on the issue if she were confident that it was better, which could make her seem to competitive and thus would negatively impact her (Young & Hurlic, 2007), she chooses the more diplomatic option which is "we can find the best way, the best method" making it a more diplomatic and less assertive option. This appeal to collective decision making will lower her appearance of decisiveness but allows her to maintain her performance of gender.

Candidate I14 is even more explicit in presenting herself as friendly and likable in her answer than I12 and I3.

> I14: yeah, I think this is very tough question because is always happening for for in my way, uh actually my personality is little bit little bit shy, if I have issue with my coworkers, um it's very difficult to talk them how to do, how um but, I know I need face it, so I always talk to them, use other way, I do friendly to talk to them.

By indicating directly that she is shy and does not like conflict, the candidate is framing herself as someone who does not get into conflicts with colleagues frequently. Continuing on that theme, she states that she would be friendly when talking to them indicating that she would take on the role of peacemaker during any potential conflicts, further framing herself as likable and easy to get along with, which are important characteristics for women in their careers who wish to be successful (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Nielsen, 2014).

A couple of the candidates choose to focus on the group dynamic rather than addressing office conflict in a direct manner. These candidates emphasize how the group handles the issue rather than themselves or actions they might have to take or, in another professional context, have taken that would cause upset or negative feelings. For example, I13 kept her answer short and diplomatic. She stated, "mmmm at first I I will courage, encourage us, my team yes, and we we will I will try my best figure out, uh, way, a meth [method] to to help each other, yeah." Her emphasis on encouraging the team frames her in a positive light and gives her the impression of being likeable and cooperative, as part of the solution, things that are important for women in the workplace (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Nielsen, 2014). She does not mention any negative feelings or talk about any direct action that might need to be taken to address the conflict directly.

Another candidate, I17 tries a similar approach by highlighting how she perceives the ideal team dynamics that would play out instead of focusing on a specific recounting of an office conflict or any unpleasant actions that might need to be taken to manage the team through it.

> I17: Let's see. (pause 3 seconds) it depends on how people, you know, is feeling at the time, let them cool off, you know, rethink, regroup, bring ourselves back together and then bring ideas to the table on how we could solve the situation so that it don't escalate, and don't nobody lose jobs or anything.

With this answer, she avoids placing blame on anyone or taking any direct actions to address the conflict. She emphasizes the need for the group members to calm down so that they can discuss solutions together without it becoming unpleasant. She then positions

herself as someone who is worried about everyone on the team being able to keep his or her jobs and continue to work together. This positions her as a collaborative teammate who cares deeply about her colleagues, which is an important image for women to maintain (Nielsen, 2014) during an interview. A similar focus on team dynamic can be seen in I9's response.

> I9: I never come to the conflict, but, what I think we should go, we should do, we will sit together aaaaand (pause 1 second) talk about the task and see how we can overcome together as a team, not individually, because when you listen to each other you will get different opinion and when you put them together I think that will be easy for us to overcome.

This candidate starts with an interesting assertion, that she never gets involved in conflicts at work, however she posits how it would be best to handle it. Even in this hypothetical situation this candidate keeps her answer positive and avoids saying anything negative about what could potentially be an unpleasant situation. The need to project empathy and likeability (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Nielsen, 2014) in her answer extends even to hypothetical situations. While it is important to present a collegial and easy to work with impression during a job interview, an individual claiming that they would never be involved in any conflict at work seems unrealistic and by extension untrue. Here the candidate has decided that presenting a likable persona, even one that stretches credulity is better than having to discuss an unpleasant situation, even hypothetically, that may paint her in a less likable light.

Candidate I2 employs a different strategy that highlights a deferential attitude towards leadership while avoiding the discussion of any unpleasantness and without having to own any direct behaviors that she herself might have to take.

> I2: (pause 1 second) mmmm I think working at, as a team, eh, doesn't have um, the same availabi-, availability to control or to make the same change as a leader can do because you cannot control your coworkers but you can control your behalf, so, do the best and you can encourage your, your coworkers to do the same, or to, to give them a sign that they did something wrong or they need to do something like that so the team can go, go good.

Here the candidate indicates that if she is on a team, she cannot control her teammates, as that type of authority is the sole possession of the leader. With this commentary, she is signaling her deference to authority, which is important for women to be positively evaluated in the workplace (Young & Hurlic, 2007). She also emphasizes her collegial attitude and warmth by explaining that she would put in her best effort and encourage teammates to do the same. From her earlier comments about leaving the leader to control the team, one can infer that her encouragements would be positive words instead of anything punitive.

Another candidate is more explicit about how she would handle conflict within a team, by completely avoiding speaking with her colleagues and deferring to a higher authority.

> I22: um, (pause 2 seconds) that mean I fighting kinda argue with my team (pause 2 seconds) uh, I mostly time I think I would don't say anything, if something make me

super angry or not agree maybe I will talk to boss if I can't (pause 3 seconds) I will not go arguing with my teamer, I don't think so.

This candidate is completely honest that she would likely not say anything to a colleague who has either upset her or with whom there is conflict on the team or directly with her. This works towards demonstrating her likeability but may work against her as it does not speak to her ability to resolve problems without calling on the supervisor to referee. There is a delicate balance between being deferential to authority and being overly reliant. This answer perhaps tips the scales towards too reliant on authority to resolve issues in the workplace. In this case, the candidate may not have been able to successfully walk the line between deferential and likeable but also competent.

Another candidate interestingly uses an example of conflict in her last place of employment that allows her to entirely sidestep the issue of putting blame on or speaking negatively about any of her colleagues by discussing the resolution of conflict that arose between the children they were charged with supervising.

> I18: well, um, there was like a time when like the kids would, you know, get into lit-like little arguments and stuff, and we would, you know, try and break it up and solve it, and take them to the side and say what's going on, what's the problem, and we solve it like that, then that type of way.

With this answer, she can demonstrate conflict resolution skills, such as separating the combatants and talking with each of the students about their perspective to come to an agreement, which positively highlights her ability to resolve conflict in a team environment. This tactic deftly avoids her having to assert authority over her colleagues, which would

negatively impact her being perceived as likable (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Nielsen, 2014). While the question did not explicitly state that the conflict the team needs to resolve be amongst the team members, it is implied; all of the talent recruiters and most of the Boston Education & Training Services candidates inferred this correctly in their answers. This could be seen as a lack of ability to parse the true intention of the question and could lead the interviewer to negatively evaluate the answer.

It is worth noting that the burden of "niceness" traditionally falls on both women and people of color.  While this analysis highlights that these are female candidates who are performing niceness, for some of these candidates the intersectional identity of gender, race and L1 provide heightened pressure of performative "niceness". This phenomenon, "gendered racism" - a term coined by Essed (1991), acknowledges that women of color, especially Black women, "like other women, . . . encounter bias and discrimination based on their gender. Like African American men, they encounter bias and discrimination based on their race" (Hughes & Dodge, 1997, p. 584). This dual bind of racism and sexism, places a unique pressure on women of color in their performance of collegiality.

In contrast, when male candidates approach this question, they do not necessarily feel the need to project likeability as strongly which frees them to be more direct in their assertions and speak more directly of their own involvement. An example of this is provided by a male candidate, I1.

> I1: (mouth noise - click) um, it was a time, I'll say, I'll bring up the same place, it was, um, in construction where, it was a conflict that the job was not done to the owner's satisfactory and I had to bring them back in it, and explain to them a different view of

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it, and uh, we had to put personal time into it to get it redone, and um, get it done uh

properly.

In this answer, the candidate takes the responsibility on himself to resolve a conflict

between his team and the client. He recalls all the workers back to the site to redo the work

they have just completed and directs them to use their own personal time to do so. Because

he is not held to likeability constraints, he does not feel the need to be apologetic when

describing the situation where he took on the mantel of leadership and directed the other

workers. The other workers may have been resentful at having to redo their work and use

unpaid time to do so. However, the candidate does not allude to this or apologize for it. He

assumes a decisive leadership role, makes the call and narrates it as such. This answer may

not have been well received by an interviewer if the narrator were a woman.

Another male candidate spoke equally directly about a conflict he had experienced at

work directly with one of his coworkers.

> I4: uh, in my work, uh, in the beginning, (pause 1 second) my coworker and me, we
>
> had uh, a misunderstanding, um (pause 1 second) because (pause 1 second) I was new
>
> employee, and, uh, he liked to give me order, uh, any time, so he's my coworker, he
>
> was my coworker, not my boss, so one day, I called on him and I spoke with him, I
>
> let you, I let him, let he know, uh, the situation, eh, it's an improper situation, so, if he
>
> want, he want, he could uh, talk to me, uh, this situation is not uh, show me, uh a
>
> person, uh as a boss because he's not a boss, so basically was a communication um
>
> (pause 1 second) situation problem situation, and after weeeee, I spoke with him

about the situation, the problem, ah, was solved, and we become a a a good friends and a good coworkers.

In this case, the candidate felt that his colleague was treating him as a subordinate instead of as an equal and he did not think that was appropriate. Instead of hinting about the conflict, he directly states what it was and how he took steps to resolve it. Without the need to be deferential to authority or project an image of empathy and likeability, he is able to acknowledge his true feelings of displeasure and admit to confronting his colleague to explain his position. His answer would be stronger were it not punctuated by pauses and fillers. The interviewer would likely accept his straightforward narration without negative assessment because he is a man but would potentially see the pauses as undercutting that directness.

**Women's Work**

Question 2 of the interview asks candidates about their ability to multitask and asks them to provide an example of a time that they needed to "manage numerous competing responsibilities." While not explicitly stated in the phrasing of the question, the talent recruiters correctly inferred that this question was asking the candidate to refer to multitasking and time management in the context of employment and thus the examples provided needed to revolve around scenarios they had faced on the job. All three female talent recruiters supplied either examples of multitasking or strategies they use to manage their time that directly relate to their current positions. The answers from the Boston Education & Training Services candidates, however, had a wider range of contexts.

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Several candidates from Boston Education & Training Services struggled to puzzle out the true intentions of the question potentially due to the way it is phrased: tell me about a time that you needed to manage numerous competing responsibilities. Several candidates provided answers describing how to solve problems and the importance of maintaining a positive attitude. Of the 16 candidates that were able to determine that the question was asking about balancing multiple responsibilities, that it was probing for examples that would demonstrate the candidate's ability to manage their time in the face of multiple assignments needing attention, six women and one man framed their answers around domestic responsibilities instead of providing examples from the workplace. The narratives fell into two categories: domestic responsibilities and financial responsibilities. Unsurprisingly, the six women framed their narratives around domestic responsibilities or "women's work," (Acker, 1990; Blair-Loy, 2003; Brines, 1994; Collins, 1994) that is caring for children, or other domestic chores while the lone man who mentioned family obligations focused on providing financial support.

Whether the root of the gender division is organizational structure, moral categories or schemas, domestic work such as childcare and house chores are considered to be firmly in the domain of women. This idea of gendered distribution of types of work crosses cultures, as evidenced by the responses from the Boston Education & Training Services candidates. These candidates hail from a variety of countries across different continents, yet these answers seem to reflect this same gendered division of labor.

Several candidates speak directly about the need to manage the different roles they must fulfill in their lives with work, which acknowledges the perceived societal division of labor. Candidate I10 gave a general plan of how she manages these competing priorities.

I10: So yeah, just to, to have a plan first I need to plan my time, what to do every day, umm make time for everything, for my life, for myself, for my kids, my family, and in general and my work of course.

In this scenario, she begins by stating that the way to manage all these competing priorities is to plan her time, by allocating time for all the different priorities. She lists the priorities that compete for her time on a daily basis, with her kids and her family listed before her work. This would seem to indicate that in a competition between family devotion schema and work devotion schema (Blair-Loy, 2003), her needs to attend to childcare and her family are more pressing than work, which seemed to come last on the list. She does not provide any examples of a time either at home or work when she demonstrated the ability to multitask or manage her time.

Candidate I7 gives a similar answer after pausing for a few seconds before responding, "have to plan my schedule, mmmm my time to go work, my time for my family, and (pause 1 second) others . . ." She makes reference to having a plan that involves time allocation, which generally addresses the question, but does not provide any elaboration on which priorities get precedence or an example of what the schedule she creates would look like. This leaves the question up to the interpretation of the interviewer. With the implicit bias, that women should be devoted to family and housework, the interviewer could interpret

her priority to be family and home, instead of work. This answer also does not give the interviewer any idea about how this candidate has prioritized work tasks in the past.

Candidate I2 gives a similar, but more elaborate look at how she balances the responsibilities between home, family and education.

I2: Um, the time or the condition that I had mmmmmm many responsibilities is my ac- my actual um time, which is work and home responsibilities and education, and I try to (pause 1 second) to separate each one from the other and give, give each one its time, the right time to to fix it and to do it well, (pause 1 second) um so I I I have choosen, in my schedule I have choosen three days which is part time as my work, and I give, I gave the prior-, priority for education because it's for my future career, so I focus more on this one, but in the same time, I didn't give up on work, also I try to to give like 20 minutes every day to to fix the stuff in my, in my house and to cook a quick meal.

Her answer differs slightly from the other candidates in that she emphasizes the importance of her job in the mix with all these other tasks and responsibilities. She also stresses the importance of education in furthering her career aspirations. Her lack of example of use of time management strategies in a work context is what weakens her answer. Including details about home chores, "fixing the stuff in my, in my house and to cook a quick meal," is an unnecessary component to a work-related answer, thus weakening it while reinforcing the idea of housework being women's work.

Another candidate, I5, used the specific example of cooking to illustrate the process of managing multiple tasks:

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I5: for example, if I cook, I love cooking, so if I cook, I would choose the the the to

wash the rice first because you put the rice to the to the, rice cooker and then you you

you have nothing to do, you can prepare your vegetable or other things, I would

manage my the times to sees important and and um (pause 1 second) necessary and

important not necessary and unnecessary aba [*self-correction sound*] unimportant

necessary and unimportant and necessary to separate four parts of them, and choose

the important one and the necessary immediately must do do it self like that to control

the time.

This candidate uses the example of cooking a meal involving rice to illustrate how to

prioritize tasks, by evaluating what an individual can put in motion and then set aside while

completing other tasks that require more direct attention. She then elaborates with a ranking

system of important and unimportant tasks and subdivides them into necessary and

unnecessary categories, a version of the Eisenhower matrix (Corporate Finance Institute,

n.d.). Overall, the system she describes would work well for time management. Framing her

answer in a professional context would have provided a stronger connection for the

interviewer to judge her work qualifications.

Framing an answer around the similarities of work and home made for an interesting

answer from a candidate who was currently working as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA).

Candidate I24 answered the question by referencing both work and personal situations where

she must multitask.

I24: many things to do? but I have many things to do, I have, I went to to help my

mom sometimes, I help her because she is sick, I help my son too, when I go to work

I help the patient too, that's why I I I like to work for the patient to help, I like that, after I don't have too much to say.

This frame would be more successful were the candidate to elaborate more on the work elements and how she balances attending to various patients' needs as a CNA. This answer explains what she needs to balance, but not how she would successfully do so. By tying in personal and professional elements to the things she balances, she furthers the connection between women and responsibility for home life (Acker 1990; Gerson 2002). This answer, while clarifying what she needs to balance, does not give the interviewer any sense of how she does that or the ability to transfer those time management skills to a professional context.

Candidate I23 provided her rubric for how she manages her time. Her answer starts with a general description of what different responsibilities she must manage and how she divides her time between each one. She then provides a detailed and elaborate schedule to further illustrate her point using three different days to show that the strategy changes based on the various responsibilities she has to attend to throughout the week.

I23: um, first thing I try to do a schedule of my life, that the reason is not a bad thing but I always work on my schedule, what time I have to go to the to school, what time I have to go to my work time, what time I have to spend with my family, and what time I have to sleep, it's like I'm everything is on paper like I'm control everything, I can give you an example by a sample day of my life, uh.

Beginning her answer with a brief description of all the responsibilities she must balance contextualizes her discipline and reinforces her positioning of herself as a hard

worker, which is something she does in her answer to the first question: tell me about yourself. This primes the listener to understand what different commitments the candidate has and shows the transferable skill of delicate balancing of time sensitive tasks that require focus and full attention. Focusing her answer on her obligations at work and how she balances those would have made a strong answer and would have allowed her to position herself as an ideal candidate by indexing professional competency instead of indexing the traditional female role of childcare and house tasks. She continues her answer by describing in detail two different days that represent the different balance of demands during her weekly schedule.

> I23: like I'm today, um, yesterday night it was my day off I choose that day as a day day off, that mean when I said day off it mean no work, but I have something else I have to do but no work, today I wake up, come to school, I have to be back to my house at three, spend three to five to my two daughters, go to sleep, and then put my alarm like um between nine and nine-fifteen to wake up me, even though I can ask my older daughters if you don't see I can't wake up myself, come put your alarm too on nine and nine-fifteen come in my bedroom and wake up me between nine and nine-fifteen, I prepare myself and then drive fifteen minutes and then to attend my office at Arlington I need to be there at ten, spend ten to six take care of elderly people, be sure they are safe, the environment is safe, I don't have to report nothing, when I said I don't have to report no- nothing it's because I don't want when I work I have like something bad happen and have to write it up like, I I don't like that, that's the reason I prefer to in the beginning make sure everything is ok, tomorrow morning

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after six when I left my office, I have to go back at home, maybe lay down for thirty

minutes or one hour that's depend like aft-.

She begins the narration by indicating that yesterday was her day off and then

launches into a description of her schedule for the present day. It is an interesting choice to

lead with her day off during a job interview instead of leading the answer with a description

of her schedule on a workday. It creates a timeline that is a bit murky, especially with the

emphasis of not working for the first few utterances of this answer. She then provides a

detailed description of her obligations for the day as well as details about both her home life -

anecdotes about her daughters waking her for work - and at work, to ensure the safety of

elderly residents in her care.  By indicating that she does not rely on her daughters to wake

her up for work she positions herself as independent and reliable. She continues this position

when she describes her work style, that she prefers to ensure everything is proper at the start

of her shift so that there will not be problems later that she will need to report. These are

important qualities in a worker and adhere well to the white upper-middle class values of

independence (Trechter, 2001) as well as steadiness and rationality (Brodkin, 2001). She then

continues the narration with a description of a typical day that she attends school.

> I23: tomorrow is Thursday, I will have school at twelve-thirty, that's mean I have
>
> enough time to sleep but before to sleep usually I, I stay inside my car when I arrive
>
> that's depend six-thirty, six-forty five, I stay inside my care between six-thirty or six
>
> forty-five to eight reading, what I'm reading is those like um, homework or some kind
>
> of like um other thing I would like to learn by myself because I don't wait for until the
>
> school give me some information, I do my own research to to get different kind of

knowledge, so I spend like um until one and half or two hours to read inside my car and then go in my home and then continue my life, maybe I can spend it one hour or thirty minutes to sleep maybe not, after that ten, ten-thirty take a bath, prepare myself, left my house at eleven-thirty, drive to come back to school, that's mean everything is like under control, under control, sometime I am tired essentially, but that is a sacrifice, my goal give me strength and then to know all of my life cannot be like that, one day everything will be done like my school for the high school, that part will be done even having another school to take college, everything but I know one day I will have enough time for myself, that is my day, that is how I control everything.

This answer provides a window into this candidate's life and shows the grit and fortitude necessary to make an extremely difficult and exhausting schedule such as she describes work in the long term. These are desirable traits in the workplace, but because of the answer's focus on home and family responsibilities mixed in with work responsibilities and the overall length and thoroughness of the minutia, it could be difficult for an interviewer to positively evaluate these traits. A less detailed overview that still allows the interviewer to understand how hard she works and how delicately she has balanced all these responsibilities because of how highly she values the need to further her education and pursue her goals, would be a powerful answer.

Interestingly, only one of the seven male candidates mentioned family or home responsibilities in his answer. When candidate I11 discusses family, it is in the sense of providing economically.

I11: so I have the first thing I have, I'm here in United States so I would like to help my family first so it is big responsibility I have, so it is a challenge for me to study, and (pause 1 second) um (pause 1 second) and to work at the same time, that can help me to send them, help them, to send them money for in Morocco, so it's a big challenge for me, so I will (pause 3 seconds) I'm doing my best to do (pause 2 seconds) to help my family and do what I want to do, to study and to continue my studying.

Providing financially for a family is traditionally seen as the responsibility of the males of the family (Acker, 1990; Blair-Loy, 2003; Brines, 1994; Collins, 1994; Gerson, 2002). This candidate explicitly shares the pressure he is under to do well at school while also providing financially for his family in his home country. The answer is interesting because he is the only male candidate to mention family obligations, and when he does so it is in reference to financial support and not childcare or housework, which are typically seen as women's work (Acker, 1990; Acker, 2006; Blair-Loy, 2003; Collins, 1994; Gerson, 2002) None of the women mentioned balancing financial support as part of their answers about time management.

**Permission to Speak Freely**

When the candidate and interviewer or interviewers come from different cultural backgrounds, it can result in a mismatch of not just narrative style but also the fundamental decision of how much time the candidate feels they should allot for their own narration. We see the evidence of this mismatch in the length and choices between the different interview groups in this study. The talent recruiters, cued in to the rules around their narration, used

more words for each answer and provided anecdotes more frequently. Interviewees from Boston Education & Training Services gave short answers on average and provided fewer anecdotes about prior work experience. In response to Question 1 - "Tell me about yourself" - talent recruiters and Boston Education & Training Services respondents used on average the same number of words. However, for Question 2 - a question about time management, the talent recruiters used, on average, one third more words than their Boston Education & Training Services counterparts. They also employed anecdotes at double the rate, fifty percent of the talent recruiters used anecdotes while only a quarter of the Boston Education & Training Services respondents did. For Question 3, a question asking about conflict management in a team environment, the numbers are even more disparate. Talent recruiters on average used double the number of words per answer and three quarters of them provided anecdotes compared to the only twenty-nine percent of Boston Education & Training Services respondents who chose to deploy anecdotes as part of their narration. Interestingly, despite using on average fewer words and providing fewer anecdotes, the Boston Education & Training Services interviews were on average slightly longer than the interviews with talent recruiters. This means that the talent recruiters were incorporating more words and anecdotes in a shorter amount of time. This combination of higher word count and shorter interview length time points to an efficiency in the narratives provided by the talent recruiters.

It was noted earlier in this thesis that answers with fewer words (more economical), were considered to be more direct and thus were given a higher FOAK rating, than longer answers in a study conducted by Swerts and Krahmer (2005). I would argue that the answers

with fewer words in this context would not be rated with a higher FOAK because these answers fail to meet the criteria of the question. By not providing an anecdote, the answers seem incomplete instead of direct. Thus, these answers would warrant a lower FOAK rating than more complete answers because these more complete answers would fulfill the requirements posed by the formulation of the question.

An example of this type of cultural influence on narrative length can be seen in an exchange between a candidate and I after she completed the interview, when I was giving her feedback about her interview answers. Each candidate who was interested was given feedback on how to improve their answers for future interviews after completing their answers to the three questions. This candidate received feedback that in future interviews the phrases "tell me about a time" or "describe a situation" are cues that a candidate should take up a narrative role to provide examples drawn from their previous work experience in the form of anecdotes. These anecdotes are used to reinforce the general explanations that they provide about the topic being asked, in this case time and conflict management. Upon hearing this candidate I5 explained that she did not necessarily understand that this was the expectation. She explained that she did not elaborate further on her answers by providing an anecdote because she "didn't want to waste anyone's time telling a story" (I5, personal communication, April 4, 2019) because the boss (interviewer) was important and had many interviews to conduct so she thought it best to keep her answers brief.

When I explained that in fact those prompts were asking her to narrate her past experience so that they could evaluate how she might perform if they were to hire her and to be thinking of several anecdotes that could fit various scenarios such as time or conflict

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management as well as success stories, she replied that now that she knew she was supposed to provide anecdotes she would be better prepared for future interviews. This instance of misread cues may be cultural in nature as "each cultural group has its specific generic forms, developed out of the social structures characteristic of that group, and developed in its political history," (Kress, 1993, p. 36) thus candidates from different backgrounds may have different strategies for organizing their answers to the questions posed to them in order to satisfy the genre requirements they believe it holds. This candidate believed the best way to make a good impression was to give an answer that included a description of strategies but did not include an actual narrative because it was best to minimize the time she was taking from the interviewer's day. Thus, by misreading what the genre called for, her answers potentially undersell her skills and abilities putting her at a disadvantage to candidates who provided full narrative responses.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

**Addressing the Research Questions**

This thesis set out to examine how candidates with diverse identities answer

behavioral interview questions that require narrative storytelling in order to be considered

successful answers. With respect to the first question, are there differences in the narrative

structure and content of answers to job interview questions for different socioeconomic

groups and linguistic groups, I found differences in the narrative structure and content of the

answers to job interview questions between different socioeconomic groups as well as

linguistic groups. The two groups of interviewees, the talent recruiters and Boston Education

& Training Services candidates, fell into two fairly distinct socioeconomic groups. The talent

recruiters are all employed in full-time jobs and were easily able to fill out that part of the

demographic form. Many of the Boston Education & Training Services candidates are

balancing studying at Boston Education & Training Services and working hourly wage jobs.

Several Boston Education & Training Services members were unable to estimate their annual

pay and wrote their hourly wages instead. The talent recruiters were all native English

speakers with a command of the White upper middle-class Discourse, whereas the Boston

Education & Training Services candidates were a much more diverse linguistic group, whose

members were a mix of native and non-native English speakers with first languages from

around the world. There were significant differences in the answers provided by the talent recruiters and the Boston Education & Training Services candidates. These differences were most evident in the questions that probed the candidates about desirable job skills, such as time management (Q2) and conflict resolution (Q3). In their answers to questions 2 and 3, all of the talent recruiters referenced their current jobs when speaking about having many, competing tasks to complete at the same time. They structured the answers to first provide brief overviews of or lead-ins to the concepts and then dove into either anecdotes or specific work-related strategies, moving from the more general concept to more specific context of application. For each of the questions, two of the talent recruiters provided job specific strategies to deal with managing their many responsibilities or defusing potentially conflict-sensitive, tense situations. While the other two told anecdotes from the current positions that specifically detailed a scenario in which they needed to use either their time management skills or their conflict resolution skills to be successful at their job and bring about a positive outcome to the scenario described. Candidates from Boston Education & Training Services used a much wider range of situational references when explaining their time management and conflict resolution abilities. Most Boston Education & Training Services candidates did not offer job specific strategies or anecdotes that highlighted these skills, instead structuring their answers by providing general descriptions of each of those skills. Those who did use scenario specific skill description or anecdotes tended to frame them in the context of balancing home responsibilities with school and work or in the context of balancing multiple responsibilities within the home. These differences in narrative structure, style and topic would all give advantage to the talent recruiters during the interview process.

In answer to question two, do talent recruiters for job placement firms, as a group, structure their answers differently than other study participants regardless of socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds, they tended to structure their answers similarly to those recommended on job interview coaching websites such as Monster.com, etc., while Boston Education & Training Services candidates, who come from more diverse linguistic backgrounds, tended to have a wider range of answer formats. Talent recruiters tended to properly interpret the questions' call to not only explain their philosophy behind the skills (time management and conflict management) but to also follow up with a workplace example that would illustrate their competency. Most Boston Education & Training Services candidates struggled to entirely understand what the question was asking for and failed to provide these narrative anecdotes to give a narrative demonstration of their competency in the skills they explained. Thus, the talent recruiters, a fairly cohesive socioeconomic and linguistic group, gave similarly structured answers to one another, but differently structured answers from many of the Boston Education & Training Services candidates. Because the questions were not always explicit in what they were asking, candidates could make different guesses as to the information that the interviewer was looking for. A Boston Education & Training Services candidate misunderstood what the first question, "tell me about yourself," was really asking about. This candidate provided personal information instead of professional information.

I24: I'm (name redacted), I'm married separate, I have one son, uh is still in the, it's still, it's at school, um but before I have two jobs, (pause 2 seconds) um, no, before I I went after the earthquake, I'm coming here, I mean Haiti I'm coming here, somebody

they help me, um after that, I'm try for the best school before I I went to the other school close to my house after my son friend tell me go to the [name of school] and I came to the [name of school] they help me good, I'm stay here, um after I'm looking for the jobs, I have two jobs but I quit for one to come to school because my English is not better.

This candidate answered the question honestly but did not provide the information that the question was really delving into: a brief explanation of her professional experiences and trajectory. In comparison, the talent recruiters provided a mix of educational history and professional experience, such as the answer provided by C3.

C3: I am a (pause 1 second) managing director for a uh small, privately owned staffing firm, uh been in the staffing industry for about 10 years, went to work at the United States military academy before that for four years um as a project manager and a quality uh control manager as well and then graduated from (Redacted) University in 2008 with a degree in Business Management with a double major in Marketing and a minor in Communications.

This talent recruiter provided a brief overview of his education as well as some career highlights without veering into personal details or giving an overly detailed answer.

In regard to question three what are the ways in which participants use multimodal repertoires, including linguistic repertoires, in indexing an identity that would be appealing to employers during a job interview, interviewees from both groups, talent recruiters and Boston Education & Training Services candidates, attempted to answer the behavioral interview questions in a way that would index, as is explained by Silverstein (2003) a

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connection between linguistic style with social meanings and identities, the identity of a good worker and thus convince the interviewer of their fitness for the position. The talent recruiters generally referenced their current or previous positions in order to index the identity of successful professionals as they answered each question. They also employed work-related anecdotes to lend support to their claims of professional competence and illustrate their capabilities on the job. Boston Education & Training Services candidates tended to rely on answers that featured descriptions of personal situations, such as balancing responsibilities at home with those at work and school, to exemplify the skills that the questions aimed to assess. However, by doing so, they did not successfully index the identity of a working professional. These answers would put Boston Education & Training Services candidates at a disadvantage if compared to the talent recruiters' answers in the eyes of employers who are looking for candidates who can convince them of their fitness for the open position by indexing the identity of a successful professional in a behavioral interview.

Interestingly, there was overlap in the way that talent representatives and Boston Education & Training Services candidates hewed closely to gender norms while answering these interview questions. Despite using different linguistic repertoires to answer the questions, female talent representatives and Boston Education & Training Services candidates tended to present themselves as agreeable, nice and likeable. While the male talent representative and male Boston Education & Training Services candidates' answers were more direct. This conformity to gender expectations was especially true when candidates answered the third question in the interview that asked them about conflict management in the workplace.

**Importance of the Study**

These gatekeeping factors influence not only the candidate, who may not get a job for which they are qualified, but also the organization that the interviewer works for as well, that will lose the opportunity to work with a qualified candidate who could potentially bring a fresh perspective to the organization. Several studies have demonstrated the benefits of diversity in the workplace. Executive boards that have gender and cultural diversity generate higher returns on equity as well as higher EBIT (earnings before interest and taxes) (Barta, Kleiner & Neumann, 2012). Companies that had at least one woman on their board outperformed others on metrics such as lower debt to equity ratios and higher average net income growth (Credit Suisse, 2012). Racially and gender diverse workplaces are able to thrive because "growth and innovation depend on people from various backgrounds working together and capitalizing on their differences" (Herring, 2009, p. 220) and thus show "increased sales revenue, more customers, greater marker share, and greater relative profits "(Herring, 2009, p. 219) than competitors in the same field. A 2018 article in Forbes asks, "Is there anyone out there who *doesn't* think that workplace diversity is a good thing?" (Shemia, 2018, p. 1, emphasis in original) If the answer is no, as is heavily implied by the rhetorical question, then why is it so difficult to achieve? Could it be that job criteria such as "excellent written and oral communication skills" still allow companies to gatekeep who they grant interviews to after phone screenings? Could the way questions are phrased cause candidates who come from diverse backgrounds to misinterpret the true intention of the question and thus provide an answer that allows hiring managers to pass them over because they did not 'fully' answer the question?

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This gatekeeping mechanism becomes a cyclical and self-fulfilling prophesy. Interviewers rely on behavioral interviews because they feel these allow the candidates to showcase their abilities and reduce bias in the hiring process (Davis & Herrera, 2013; Powers, 2000; Srinivasa & Humes, 2017), they hire individuals who perform well in the job interview by virtue of being part of the same or similar Discourse or by engineering sufficient adequation to that of the interviewer. These individuals go on to do well on the job, thus reinforcing the interviewer's perspective that this type of interview managed to assist them in obtaining a highly qualified candidate who is right for the job, thus reinforcing their acceptance of and investment in this job interview format. The candidates who are able to align their answers to the Discourse the interviewers were expecting despite not being a part of that community, thus indexing (Silverstein, 2003) that social status and competency, help to reinforce the interviewer's perspective that this is a fair methodology for hiring that excludes those who are less qualified.

This cyclical pattern further entrenches monocultures within organizations that contribute to the failure of their efforts to diversify the workplace. Initiatives to diversify workplaces tend to focus either on finding ways to make the current diversity (gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation) within your workplace feel more comfortable and happier in the workplace (Asare, 2019; Zoiceska, 2020) or strategies to target more diverse audiences with job postings (Zoiceska, 2020). However, without addressing the way behavioral interviews can inadvertently create gatekeeping scenarios that reduce diversity in hiring, it is unlikely that organizations will see many benefits in obtaining and retaining a diverse workforce.

**Impact on the Candidates**

There are various impacts that being misjudged during an interview can have on candidates. The first and most immediate is that the individual will be passed over for the job they are interviewing for. In an immediate sense this can be devastating for a number of reasons, including a loss of self-esteem and a loss of potential to increase earnings. In the long term this can have the effect of discouraging a candidate from trying to obtain a similar job in the future. It also means that there is an additional burden to each candidate who did not inherit the White upper-middle class Discourse, to learn it and then deploy it strategically during job interviews in order to prove their competence and capability to perform the job in question. This sentiment is expressed by individuals, e.g., Brandy Varnado, who are working in social justice spaces on platforms such as Instagram. "There is an unspoken expectation when you are in the corporate world, that you have to deny a part of your culture. The expectation is that you will assimilate to the dominant culture" (Varnado, 2021). This means that candidates may need to do additional research, invest in coaching or other training programs that would give them instructions and, critically, feedback as to how to best engineer answers for behavioral interviews in a way that reflects this dominant Discourse of the White upper middle-class. This additional work is added to the volume of work required to apply to jobs, such as reviewing and updating a resumé, writing a cover letter, and putting together a list of professional references. As expressed by one activist on Instagram, "I'm *tired* of code switching. Wh.te (White) folx need to learn how to code *interpret*" (Hill, 2021, emphasis in original). Because the burden of codeswitching is entirely one way, it falls heaviest on the candidates to learn to code switch and does not create an additional burden

for hiring managers who are in the privileged position of already possessing this Discourse

and not needing to learn additional ones in order to be successful.

**Impact on Organizations**

When interviewing is left in the hands of managers who are part of the White upper

middle-class Discourse, they may not evaluate the narratives given by interviewees properly,

undervaluing or not recognizing the skills the candidate could bring to the position. This will

impact who is recommended for hiring or selected to move further in the interview process.

This in turn, impacts the overall culture of the organization by homogenizing the employees

who are brought through the doors. By selecting those who look like management, the

workplace will have a distinct lack of diversity. While in the short term, this may provide a

sense of cohesion and a lack of friction in the workplace, as described above, this has an

overall negative impact on the workplace in terms of profitability, problem solving and

agility.

**Training for Whom?**

While there are plenty of programs and websites that aim at teaching candidates how

to craft the perfect answer, there are not as many resources to help interviewers avoid

implicit bias based on different storytelling methods. The onus falls entirely on the

candidates to engineer adequation (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004) in their responses despite the

many benefits of a diverse workforce for organizations. Organizations in Boston such as

Boston Education & Training Services or ABC Training Institute (both pseudonyms for the

actual Boston-based organizations) design curriculum to help candidates construct narratives

that will fit the style of upper-middle class White interviewers. However, there are not

similar organizations that train interviewers to fairly assess different narrative styles from different cultural backgrounds or genders. Training should go both ways.

Job seekers can benefit from coaching in order to best answer behavioral interview questions. Many workforce development and training programs offer trainees some support in improving their interview performance. In order for this support to be effective, it must address more than just the general structures that answers to these types of questions should have, for example the STAR method, which stands for Situation, Task, Action and Result (Doyle, 2021) and is a popular way to structure successful behavioral interview answers. In this technique, candidates briefly describe the Situation so that the interviewer will understand the context, then elaborate on the Task(s) that the candidate completed and the Action(s) that the candidate took to successfully resolve the Situation, and finally describe the positive Result(s) that these Task(s) and Action(s) brought about (Doyle, 2021; Leonard, 2021). This narrative style allows job seekers to impress the interviewer by highlighting their accomplishments and showcasing the positive influence in the workplace they have had in their former position (Chirgwin-Bell, 2019). Job seekers will need a deeper understanding of the genre of behavioral interviews if they are to successfully craft responses to these prompts that will better fit the genre expectations. There are several key factors that might be harder to parse for individuals who are native English speakers but not part of the White upper-middle class Discourse or are non-native English speakers. Job candidates must be able to recognize the storytelling prompts, understand the deeper meaning of what the question is asking for, know which genre of story would be appropriate to deploy as an anecdote and which to avoid, as well as how to structure the anecdote to make it compelling.

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Identifying that the question is prompting them to craft a narrative is the first step in successfully answering a behavioral interview question. Questions that include phases such as "tell me about a time," "describe a scenario," or "tell me about a situation" are setting up the expectation that the candidate will provide an anecdote related to the theme of the question. Candidates must be able to identify these prompts and understand that this is an invitation to take extended narrative control, that it does not serve their interests to give a short answer that neglects to provide sufficient context and narration and then cede the floor back to the interviewer.

Job candidates must also receive instruction on interpreting the true meaning of the question, which may not always be obvious. For example, question two "Tell me about a time you had to manage numerous competing responsibilities, how did you handle that?" is really asking about the candidate's time management abilities. This means that any anecdotes should revolve around situations, preferably at work, where the candidate was able to implement a strategy to complete tasks and job-related obligations as well as insight into how they determined the importance of items and the amount of time dedicated to them while meeting any deadlines. Understanding the meaning behind what the question is truly probing for can help candidates best decide which anecdotes would be the most appropriate to tell. Candidates will also need explicit instruction on which topics would be best to center their anecdotes on and which are best to avoid, especially for those who might not have a lot of work experience. Anecdotes centered on non-work scenarios, such as cooking and childcare, do not necessarily index the identity of a successful administrative professional and thus could adversely impact the interviewer's assessment of the candidate.

Candidates should also be coached on finding the delicate balance between using enough words to properly describe and demonstrate their capabilities and going too far into detail on stories that it obscures the narrative thread. While it is important to describe enough of the context of the situation in the anecdote so that the interviewer can understand why the story is important and how specifically this highlights the candidate's fitness as an employee, the interviewee should not include so many details as to bog down the interviewer's ability to be engaged with the narrative. This delicate balance of creating a compelling narrative that highlights their skills without being overly long takes practice and explicit feedback. A clear example of this was the narrative provided by candidate I23 in answer to question 2. Her narrative positioned her as a hard worker, who is dedicated to completing each task with attention to detail while balancing the many responsibilities she has both professionally and personally. However, the narrative was so long and so detailed that it was sometimes difficult to appreciate the important points she was making

Interviewers must also be coached on how to interpret different narratives styles. Anti-bias training that focuses on implicit bias may not cover the topic of how one receives and interprets stories despite evidence that this is culturally dependent (Gumperz, 1992; Gumper, et al., 1984; Heath, 1983; Michaels, 1981; Michaels & Cazden, 1986; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Scollon & Scollon, 1984). It is imperative for the health and well-being of companies that their interviewers are able to fairly evaluate the narratives of candidates from a wide variety of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds in order to hire a diverse and competent workforce, especially if these companies continue to rely on behavioral interviews in hiring. Returning to the example of the answer for question 2 provided by I23, the question

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asked about the ability to manage time and the candidate provided an answer that demonstrated her ability to manage time under extremely stringent constraints. Being able to understand the narrative she provided would give hiring managers a better chance at fairly assessing her as a potential worker.

However, it may also be prudent to combine other types of interviewing techniques with storytelling narrative questions. Skill-based assessments provide a way for candidates to demonstrate their abilities without the need to evaluate the way they talk about their skills. This could provide the employer with a less biased assessment of the candidates' skills that would pair well with the information they gather from the behavioral interview. This would allow the potential employer to assess skills and communication style at the same time to get a more holistic look at the candidate.

**Applications - Lesson Planning the Job Interview**

However, since there is currently no system in place to apply pressure on the dominant Discourse to fairly assess other, non-dominant Discourses especially in the employment arena, it behooves English language instructors to help students identify and utilize different discourse registers so that each student can make a more conscious choice of how their linguistic choices, such as vocabulary, grammar and narrative structure, will be interpreted and reacted to by those around them.

The first obstacle that candidates will face in a job interview setting is properly interpreting what the question is asking. Teaching students about how to interpret the formatting and the topic of the question will help them to better formulate their answers. Does the question contain the phrase "tell me about a time", "describe a situation/scenario"

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or something similar sounding? In this case, the interviewer is inviting the candidate to not only give a general description but also provide an anecdote that demonstrates to the interviewer that they have the particular skill they are asking about. Part of understanding the question will entail understanding which skills they are asking about. Is the interviewer asking the candidate about having to balance responsibilities or how the candidate prioritizes when they have many different tasks? The interviewer is asking about time management skills. Is the interviewer asking the candidate about getting along with co-workers or dealing with unpleasant situations? Then the interviewer is asking about conflict resolution skills. Is the interviewer asking about how the candidate would handle situations that do not go the way they had planned? Then the interviewer could be asking about problem-solving skills or the ability to be flexible on the job. Being able to interpret the true intensions behind the question and what skill the interviewer would like to hear more about will help to guide students about which anecdote they choose to deploy.

The next step would be to brainstorm topics for anecdotes that students can use that would index a professional identity. This means helping students to choose anecdotes that are centered on study and work experiences, shying away from personal topics such as housework, cooking and childcare responsibilities unless the student can make a clear connection between the transferrable skill used in those scenarios. The instructor should take time to acknowledge the power structure involved in the judgements of which anecdotes would index a professional identity and which will not be evaluated in such a positive manner. In this way, students can make their own choices as to whether they want to deploy

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anecdotes that may not be as highly valued but feel important to them, or whether they will work to adequate their answers to the more generic and acceptable topics.

The instructor can then give students a short list of common job skills that employers ask about during interviews. Students can work together to brainstorm anecdotes from their professional careers or studies that would highlight their abilities. The instructor can then explain that these anecdotes need to be concise so that they properly convey why the anecdote fits the question, why it was important enough to mention and demonstrates that the job candidate has the desired skill set by using the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) Method. This way of organizing the anecdote allows the candidate to summarize the important details and create a concise narrative that gives enough information without obscuring the narrative with too many details. Each student can choose one idea that they wrote in their brainstorm to craft a full anecdote. Students can then practice these anecdotes with the instructor, who will give feedback on language (vocabulary, grammar, etc.) while also giving them feedback on how well the anecdote fits in the interview discourse (does the topic index a professional identity? Is the anecdote cohesive and concise? Does it address the underlying job skill the question is asking about?)

By giving feedback that goes beyond just correct vocabulary, pronunciation or grammar structures, the instructor can call the students' attention to the other ways that their interview answers will be judged. This gives the students the chance to make conscious choices about how to present themselves to potential employers with a more complete knowledge of the culture context and baggage that will be present with them during the interview.

**Future Research Possibilities**

There are several interesting avenues that could be pursued to deepen our understanding of the mechanism by which subtle discrimination may be occurring in behavioral interviews. One area of interest would be to play the recordings of the Boston Education & Training Services candidates to the talent recruiters or other hiring managers and ask them to give honest reactions to the answers. Another potential area of study could look at the effectiveness of job interview training for members who do not come from a dominant Discourse background. A different branch of research could examine whether attempts to broaden these hiring managers' ability to understand different narratives changes their hiring practices.

The first avenue of further research would involve utilizing the recordings made during this project to assess hiring manager reactions to the Boston Education & Training Services candidates' answers as well as to follow up with Boston Education & Training Services candidates on the framing of their answers. Assessing hiring managers' responses to the Boston Education & Training Services candidates' answers will help clarify the results of this research and how hiring managers respond to different questions. By asking hiring managers questions that relate to how well they think the candidate answered the questions, if they believe the candidate fully answered the questions, how they would rate the candidates FOAK and would they hire the candidate, we can assess to some degree how the hiring managers are receiving these responses. Asking Boston Education & Training Services candidates about their answers will help clarify some of the assumptions made in this study. Questions like, how do you interpret prompts like "tell me about a time" or "describe a

situation where," reasons for selecting certain characteristics during the "tell me about yourself" portion of the interview, and questions that gauge how comfortable the candidates were in taking on the narrative mantle would clarify their framing and positionality in their answers. This type of research would also highlight the potential differences in expectations between the two groups.

Another interesting avenue for investigation would be the efficacy of job interview training programs at helping candidates to craft answers that model that of the dominant White upper-middle class hiring managers. There are several programs in Boston, ABC Training Institute, Boston Education & Training Services, and others, that work with candidates trying to break into full-time administrative based employment. Each of these programs does a degree of coaching to help candidates prepare themselves for interviews. It would be interesting to examine how these programs influence the candidates' answers, in terms of positionality and length, as well as if it changes the way candidates interpret the questions. Ultimately, it would be interesting to see how well candidates are able to adequate their answers after completing this type of trainings compared to before taking the training.

**Study Limitations**

There were several limitations in this study. The first limitation is sample size. I interviewed four talent recruiters and twenty-four students who are currently training to seek better employment. The second limitation is the length of the interview itself. I selected three common questions to use for the mock interviews. This gives me only a limited amount of language to analyze. Despite these limitations, I was able to interview candidates from diverse backgrounds and with diverse work experience. These interviews give insight into

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how those who are fluent in the dominant Discourse used in the workplace narrate their answers to behavioral interview questions differently than those who are not as well versed in that Discourse.

**Significance of the Study**

This research is significant because it explores an avenue for unintentional bias to enter the job interviewing process. If interviewers are better able to understand the different ways that they may hear stories during an interview, they may be more likely to more fairly evaluate the stories they are hearing. This study will also help individuals who train job seekers how to answer interview questions by giving them a framework to make suggestions in how these job seekers can better align their answers to what hiring managers expect to hear.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

While conducting the research and analyzing the data involved in this thesis, I found

significant differences in the ways that talent recruiters and Boston Education & Training

Services candidates structured their answers to behavioral interview questions. These

differences include the length and topics addressed in the answers as well as the inclusion of

anecdotes to illustrate competency. Talent recruiters were able to craft narratives that hewed

closely to the White upper middle-class Discourse standards that dictate the ideal answers

and that interviewers are receptive to hearing. Their answers focused primarily on

professional accomplishments and scenarios. While Boston Education & Training Services

candidates' answers, though describing the same skill set, were not structured in a way that

would be well received by hiring managers who are expecting answers to be formatted

differently. Their answers had a much wider range of topics chosen to try to illustrate

competency, such as housework and family responsibilities. These differences in narrative

style presented by the Boston Education & Training Services candidates could negatively

impact their ability to get jobs that they possess the skill set to be successful in because the

interviewers will not be able to properly evaluate their responses. Because of the narrative

style mismatch, the hiring managers may not be able to understand and positively assess the

skill set of the candidate.

**Societal Importance**

While many companies seek to increase the diversity of their workforce due to the numerous benefits of a multicultural and diverse workplace, their measures do not usually target the interview process through which the candidates must pass to be hired. These initiatives many times involve thinking of creative ways to advertise job postings to a diverse audience and encourage diverse candidates to apply, but do not address the next steps after these diverse candidates apply, including their participation in the interview process. All prospective employees are expected go through a behavioral interview, which companies consider to be a level playing field as it gives each candidate the chance to present themselves in the best light. However, because of the potential mismatch between what the hiring managers think is the best way to present oneself and the way the candidate thinks is the best way to present oneself, this process is often rife with implicit bias. Not all prospective employees will have narrative styles that match those of the interviewers, thus leaving some potential candidates and others at a disadvantage. Diversity in the workplace has been shown to be a benefit to employers, yet even well-intentioned companies struggle to hire and retain a diverse workforce. Companies who try to hire from a more diverse candidate pool will then lament that, despite receiving many applications from a diverse group they were only able to hire the qualified candidates who match their criteria. This thesis shows that advertising to a diverse population alone will not solve the diversity issue if these candidates apply only to be excluded from consideration during the interview process because of a Discourse mismatch between them and the interviewer. These candidates who are eliminated using this interview process may be perfectly qualified, but do not narrate

their experiences in a way that allows hiring managers to properly evaluate their

qualifications, thus excluding them from employment at these companies.

**Implications for Teaching**

These findings have implications for language teaching programs, specifically to

those who cater to adult immigrants who are studying the language in order to increase their

chance of being hired outside of the service sector. These programs should, and usually do,

offer units specific to interviewing skills that focus not only on language skills but also body

language and physical presentation. These are other important aspects of the interview

process so that candidates can try to match the "saying-doing" (Gee, 1989) Discourse style of

the company to which they are applying.  In order to best serve students, these courses must

also include specific instruction on how to construct and structure narratives that will mirror

the White upper middle-class Discourse patterns of storytelling as well as instruction on

which topics to discuss and which to avoid in order for students to index the identity of a

successful professional. In order to give students the opportunity to adequate (Bucholz &

Hall, 2004) their answers to what is expected from hiring managers, instruction must make

what is usually implicit within a language explicit. Students must not only be given the tools

to speak the language but also to decode the way in which linguistic features such as turns of

phrase, vocabulary, and structures of sentences and stories can index cultural values and

identities. In this way, they can make the choice about how to present themselves during the

interview.

What is problematic about this recommendation is that it merely perpetuates the

power of the White upper middle-class Discourse, in that it asks nothing of those with this

primary Discourse and leaves all accommodation up to those outside of this Discourse to learn to adjust their way of speaking so as to be properly evaluated in situations such as job interviews. This effectively insulates members of the dominant Discourse from needing to learn about or value other ways of "saying-doing" (Gee, 1989) that are equally as valid as their own. It will also continue to concentrate wealth and power, in the forms of salaried, benefits-eligible jobs, in the hands of those who belong to this dominant Discourse or who can engineer sufficient adequation (Bucholz & Hall, 2004) to the dominant Discourse.

In conclusion, as many individuals becomes more attuned to the discrimination that is built in the fabric of our society, companies are examining ways in which they can reduce their bias, or appearance of bias, and diversify their workforce. Diversity initiatives in companies large and small have been created in order to address this lack of diversity. However, many of these initiatives have not yet examined an area of discrimination that gatekeeps companies from bringing on employees from diverse backgrounds: the behavioral interview and the way that interviewers perceive the narrative answer of job candidates from diverse backgrounds outside of the dominant Discourse of the White upper middle-class. This thesis attempted to examine the ways in which diverse job candidates would respond to behavioral interview prompts to determine if there would, in fact, be a difference between the structure and content of their answers in comparison to those already steeped in the dominant Discourse. Distinct differences in the narrative structure, content and even interpretation were found between diverse job candidates and those who would typically be conducting job interviews. Past research has shown that those in the dominant Discourse often struggle to properly and fairly assess the discourse of those from non-dominant groups, setting up the

behavioral job interview as the next frontier that companies must examine to tackle systemic

bias in their hiring process should they truly wish to diversify their workforce.

# APPENDIX

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM

| Demographic Information Form |
|---|

| Interviewee Number: |
|---|

| Age: |
|---|

| Race/Ethnicity: |
|---|
| White |
| Black |
| Latino(a) |
| Native American |
| Asian |
| Other: |

| First Language: |
|---|
| English |
| Spanish |
| Portuguese |
| Arabic |
| Chinese - Mandarin |
| Chinese - Cantonese |
| Vietnamese |
| French |
| Haitian Creole |
| Cape Verdean Creole |
| Other: _____ |

| Number of Languages You Speak/Understand: |
|---|

| Education: |
|---|
| What is the highest level of education? |
| Completed some high school |
| Obtained a high school diploma |
| Completed some college |
| Obtained a bachelor's degree |
| Completed some graduate school |
| Obtained a master's degree |
| Obtained a doctorate |

| Where did you complete the highest level of education? |
|---|

| Annual Income: |
|---|

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