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Gesturing in an Interview Situation:

Effects of Gender

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Running head: GESTURING IN AN INTERVIEW SITUATION

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Abstract

The present research investigates differences between males and females in the use and effects of physical gesturing in an interview situation. Subjects observed a prerecorded job interview of a male or a female applicant whose gesturing was either broad (hands/arms moving away from the body), narrow (hand/arms moving close to the body), or not used (hands folded on lap). Subjects then completed the following evaluations: 1) ranking of six jobs (two stereotypically masculine, two stereotypically feminine, and two androgynous as determined by a pilot study) in order of appropriateness for the candidate, and 2) evaluating the applicant and the type of gesturing used, using a bipolar adjective scales type of questionnaire.

The results suggest that in placing individuals in jobs, women stereotype both men and women according to the type of gesturing used. Men, on the other hand, stereotype only men according to the type of gesturing used, but stereotype women regardless of the type of gesturing used. Implications of this stereotyped job placement on both women's and men's opportunities are discussed.

Gesturing in an Interview Situation:

Effects of Gender

Extensive research has explored gender differences in nonverbal communication styles. Much of this research has demonstrated that specific differences exist between the nonverbal behavior of males and females. There is evidence that women are generally more able to express their emotions nonverbally than are men (Sabatelli, Buck & Dreyer, 1982). Leffler, Gillespie, and Conaty (1982) found that men touch and point more than females while females smile and laugh more. In addition, Russo (1975) demonstrated that females tend to show greater eye contact than males, but that women's eye contact may not be an expression of dominance as it is for men, but rather an attempt to establish a relationship or show affection. Hence, the present research will examine this expression of dominance and submissiveness through nonverbal communication and specifically, through gesturing.

Henley (1977) has established the existence of nonverbal norms for the sexes. Through these norms women are restricted to warm and submissive gestures while men are expected to use intimidating and dominant gestures. These norms are consistent with the findings of Freize and Ramsey (1976) which state that two patterns of behavior exist in our society, one which

reflects dominance and status, and another which reflects emotional warmth. The encouragement of this instrumental behavior in males and expressive behavior in females is indicative of gender-role stereotyping.

Research investigating the implications of these gender differences is less abundant or inconclusive. This is rather surprising considering that reactions to violations of these nonverbal norms for the sexes may be quite severe in many instances. For example, a woman who engages in inappropriate gender role gesturing in an interview may not be hired for that very reason. Henley (1973) suggests that when nonverbal norms are broken by females, the gestures take on sexual connotations and therefore make others (the interviewer, in the previous example) feel uncomfortable.

Several studies have provided significant results which seem to suggest that nonverbal behavior is related to feelings of dominance and submissiveness. Staring, pointing, and touching may be considered as dominance gestures while lowering and/or averting the eyes, stopping action or speech, and cuddling to the touch are the respective submissive gestures (Henley, 1973). Henley (1973) also considers interruption to be a gesture of dominance, with allowing interruption being the corresponding submissive gesture. Other gestures which convey dominance are a stern facial expression and

crowding. The respective submissive gestures are smiling and yielding space (Henley, 1977).

This nonverbal language is not learned in school, as the spoken language is, but is learned informally as differential socialization occurs for males and females; this process begins long before the school-age years (Henley, 1973). In fact, according to Henley (1973) much of our nonverbal behavior has developed through socialization to emphasize and display gender differences. In consideration of these factors, then, it becomes evident that women have learned to display gestures which continually reinforce their position of lower status. Therefore, women are necessarily placed in a submissive position.

Research investigating parallels between space-consuming gestures and spatial behavior has been quite convincing. Frieze and Ramsey (1976) researched the physical space characteristics of males and females. The underlying assumption of this research is that one who occupies more physical space is more powerful, more dominant, and has higher status than one who occupies less physical space. As expected, they found that males are more likely to occupy more physical space than females. For example, men tend to sit with their legs and arms spread apart, while women usually sit with their legs together and their arms close to their body.

Leffler, Gillespie, and Conaty (1982) found additional support for the previous findings. In addition, Rekers, Amaro-Plotkin, and Low (1977) determined that females are more likely to show a limp wrist and a bent elbow than are males.

Piercy (1973) has suggested that gestures prescribed for women by society are those which contract oneself and one's space for the purpose of protection. It has been suggested that this is due to the socialization of females to occupy less physical space, even in their gesturing, and therefore, be more submissive. The culmination of this past research seems to point to the relationship between nonverbal behavior and social status. It is the implications of this relationship on the interviewing process and job search which this research seeks to investigate.

The present research seeks to determine: 1) the type of job (masculine, feminine, or neutral) which individuals are more likely to assign an applicant to as a result of the type of gesturing used, 2) if the job assignments are affected by the gender of the subject, and 3) how the applicant is evaluated based on the type of gesturing. Specifically, it is expected that 1) both males and females will be more likely to assign an applicant to gender-role appropriate jobs when gender-role appropriate gesturing is used; and 2) both males

and females will evaluate an applicant more positively when he/she uses gender-role appropriate gesturing.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 49 female and 41 male undergraduate students from the University of Richmond Introduction to Psychology classes. Subjects received research participation credit for their participation.

Materials

Interview questions (see Appendix A) and answers were controlled for appropriateness using a Recruiter and Interviewer Manual (1988) and a list of common interview questions (Northwestern University, 1977-78). A camcorder was used to record the interviews and a color television was used to show the interviews to subjects.

Data collection materials included 31 bipolar adjective scales (see Appendix B) and six gender-typed jobs to be ranked (see Appendix C). These jobs were determined by a pilot study in which subjects categorized 100 jobs as appropriate for males, females, or either.

Procedure

Experimental confederates served as applicants and staged six interviews in the following conditions: 1) male applicant-no gestures, 2) female applicant-no

gestures, 3) male applicant-big gestures (hands/arms moving far from the body), 4) female applicant-big gestures, 5) male applicant-small gestures (hands/arms moving close to the body), and 6) female applicant-small gestures. The female interviewer is not visible. Subjects were instructed to think of themselves as the interviewer.

Groups of subjects observed one of the six interviews. Subjects then: 1) ranked six jobs in the order that they would hire the applicant for those jobs; and 2) used 31 bipolar adjective scales to evaluate the applicant and the gesturing. The gender of the subjects was recorded on the questionnaire.

Results

Non-parametric analyses were used for the job rankings. A Friedman two-way ANOVA was used to compare the job rankings across all possible combinations of the independent variables (applicant gender, subject gender, and type of gestures). The jobs were coded as follows. Masculine jobs: car salesperson (M1), construction plant supervisor (M2); Feminine jobs: cosmetics salesperson (F1), interior designer (F2); neutral jobs: newspaper reporter (N1), research analyst (N2). In the female subject, female applicant, small gestures condition the mean rank ordering was as follows: F1, N1, F2, M1, M2, N2. In the female subject, male

applicant, big gestures condition the mean rank ordering was as follows: M1, N1, M2, F1, N2, F2. In the male subject, female applicant, big gestures condition the mean rank ordering was as follows: F1, F2, N1, M1, N2, M2. In the male subject, male applicant, small gestures condition the mean ranking was as follows: F2, M1, F1, N1, N2, M2. In the female subject, male applicant, small gestures condition the mean ranking was as follows: M1, N2, F2, N1, F1, M2. Table 1 shows that significant differences existed between some, but not all of the jobs (NOTE: Since the female subject, male applicant, small gestures condition has no practical implications it has been omitted from Table 1). There were no significant differences in the

Insert Table 1 about here

job rankings in any of the other conditions.

The analysis of the bipolar adjective scales was a 2 x 2 x 3 mixed model ANOVA. The first two factors were applicant gender and subject gender. The third factor was the type of gesture (big, small, none). The dependent variables were the 31 individual adjectives bipolar adjective scales which also included manipulation checks to determine the effectiveness of the independent variable of gestures. Due to the large

number of ANOVAs calculated, a Bonferroni correction for familywise error was used. The Bonferroni changed the level of significance for each ANOVA to .003 in order to achieve an overall level of significance of .05 for the series of ANOVAs. At the .003 level of significance, no significant interactions occurred; however, main effects were found for the manipulation checks on gestures.

First, a main effect occurred for the presence of gestures ($F(2,78) = 90.304, p < .003$). Subjects noticed that there was more hand and arm movement in both the big gestures condition ($M = 6.43$) and small gestures condition ($M = 6.30$) than in the no gestures condition ($M = 2.03$). In addition, a main effect occurred for the type of gestures used ($F(2,78) = 108.644, p < .003$). Subjects noticed that the gestures used were bigger in the big gestures condition ($M = 1.47$) and the small gestures condition ($M = 3.47$) than in the no gestures condition ($M = 6.37$).

Main effects were also found for the masculine ($F(2,78) = 14.871, p < .003$) and feminine ($F(2,78) = 20.220, p < .003$) variables. Figure 1 shows that

Insert Figure 1 about here

subjects rated the applicants as more masculine when big gestures were used ($M = 4.97$) than when small gestures

were used ($\bar{M} = 2.93$) and also rated the applicants as more feminine when small gestures were used ($\bar{M} = 5.03$) than when big gestures were used ($\bar{M} = 2.63$). A main effect was found for politeness ($F = 18.802, p < .003$). Subjects rated the applicants as more polite when small gestures ($\bar{M} = 2.97$) and no gestures were used ($\bar{M} = 2.90$) than when big gestures were used ($\bar{M} = 4.30$). No other significant main effects occurred for the bipolar adjective scales.

General Discussion

The results obtained here suggest, first of all, that gestures are indeed noticed in an interview situation. Furthermore, both men and women are considered more masculine and feminine, respectively, when gender role appropriate gesturing is used. In addition, both male and female applicants were considered more polite when no gestures or small gestures were used than when big gestures were used. Additionally, women seemed confused by men using small gestures and were therefore unsure of the type of job to place those men in. Finally, women are attuned to the gesturing patterns of both men and women and place individuals into stereotypically appropriate jobs when gestures are gender role appropriate. When inappropriate gesturing was used, no significant patterns emerged. Men, however, seem to attend to

gesturing patterns of other men, and when inappropriate, place men in stereotypically inappropriate jobs. When men used appropriate gesturing, no significant stereotyping occurred. Men place women in stereotypically appropriate jobs when they use masculine gesturing, but not when they used feminine gesturing.

In order to assess the implications of these findings we will assume that the subject was the interviewer. The findings are of particular importance for individuals being interviewed by males, which, incidentally, is probably more likely to occur. When male applicants using feminine gesturing are interviewed by men, they are placed in stereotypically feminine jobs, suggesting that the interviewer believes the applicant to be somewhat feminine. When female applicants are interviewed by males they are placed in stereotypically feminine jobs when they used masculine gesturing. This placement suggests that women are seen as appropriate for and capable of handling only stereotypically feminine jobs. Furthermore, this belief is so firmly implanted in the minds of these men, that it overrides the physical reality displayed in the individual through gesturing. In other words, using more masculine gestures will not allow women to move into the stereotypically masculine job market.

These results provide support for the finding of

both Henley (1977) and Frieze and Ramsey (1976) who theorized that norms do exist for gesturing and that these norms are very different for males and females. Further support is found for Henley (1973) who suggested that these norms prescribed for women by society contribute to the continual placement of women in stereotypically feminine and, therefore, submissive positions. Additional support is found for Piercy's (1973) findings which suggest that the feminine norms for gesturing prescribe movement close to the body while the masculine norms for gesturing prescribe movement far from the body.

Implications of the nonverbal norms and power structure for the sexes are of particular interest to women because they are the oppressed group and should be aware of all the social norms and expectations restricting them to "their" place. With this knowledge, women may begin to understand how these norms affect their lives, and incorporate this knowledge and understanding into their struggle for liberation (Henley, 1973).

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women may begin to understand how these norms affect their lives, and incorporate this knowledge and understanding into their struggle for liberation (Henley, 1973).

Counteracting the nonverbal norms and power structure cannot be expected to change the basic power relationships in our society. Knowledge and understanding of them will, however, increase consciousness and help people, women in particular, to recognize the many subtle ways in which they are inhibited, coerced, and controlled (Henley, 1973).

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Author Notes

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. How would you describe your academic achievements?
3. Is there something that you've done that you're very proud of?
4. What are some factors that are important to you in a company?
5. What are your weaknesses?
6. What kinds of situations make you feel tense or nervous?
7. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
8. What makes you happy?
9. What have you learned from your mistakes?
10. Why should I hire you?
11. Is there anything else you think I should know about you?

NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR

Smile	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Frown
No Hand/Arm Movement	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Hand/Arm Movement
Good Posture	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Bad Posture
Hand Movement	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Arm Movement
Knees crossed	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Knees distant
Head Movement	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	No Head Movement
Eye Contact	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	No Eye Contact
Big Hand/Arm Movement	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Small Hand/Arm Movement

Appendix C
Gender-typed Jobs

Masculine Jobs:

Car Salesperson

Construction Plant Supervisor

Feminine Jobs:

Cosmetics Salesperson

Interior Designer

Neutral Jobs:

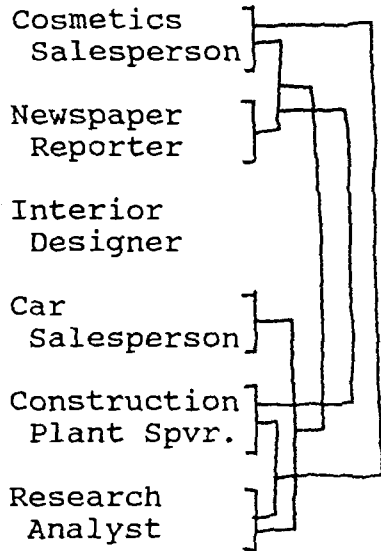
Newspaper Reporter

Research Analyst

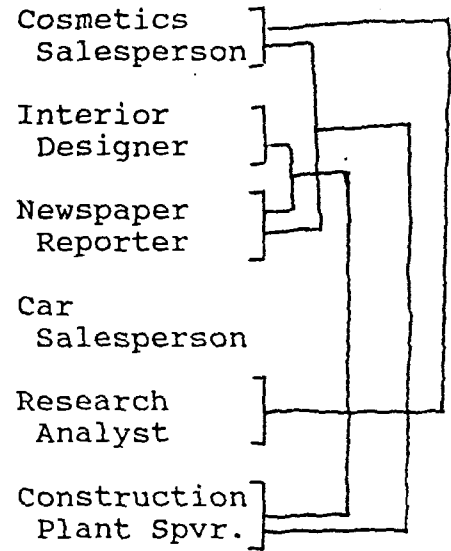
Table 1

Mean Job Rankings

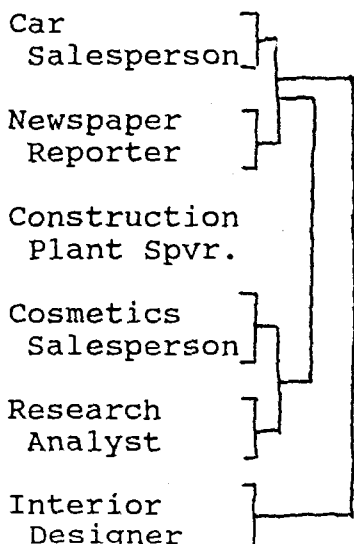
Female Subject
Female Applicant
Small Gestures:



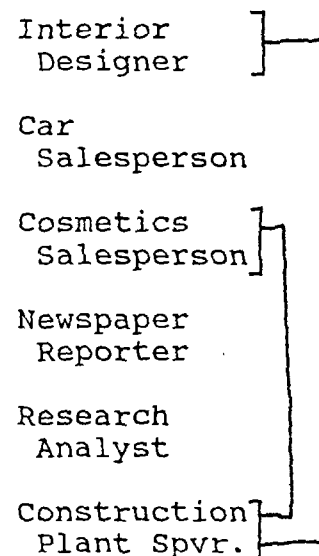
Male Subject
Female Applicant
Big Gestures:



Female Subject
Male Applicant
Big Gestures:

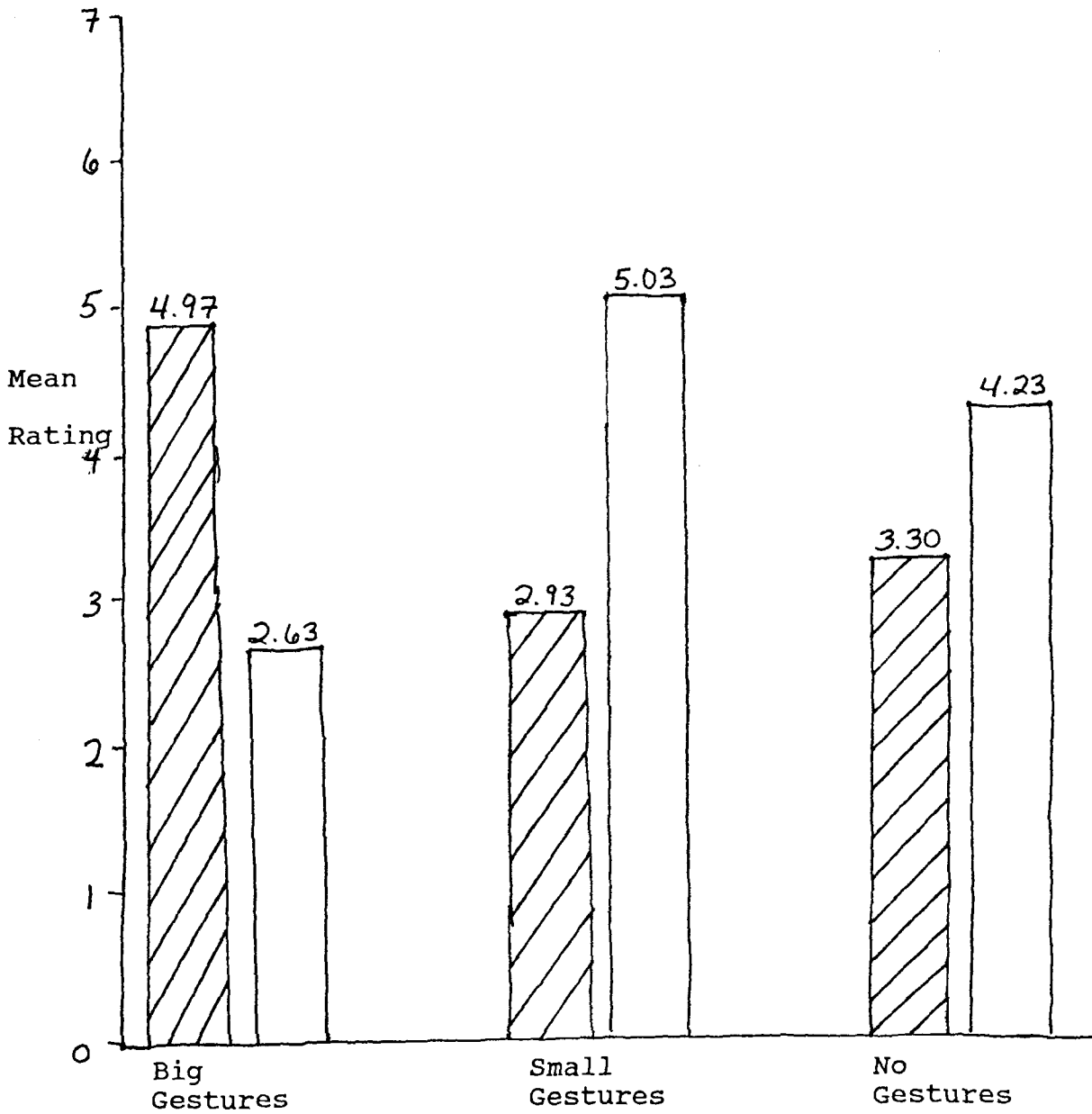



Male Subject
Male Applicant
Small Gestures:



NOTE: Brackets indicate significant differences.

Figure 1. Mean ratings of masculine and feminine variables as a function of type of gestures.



 Feminine

 Masculine