

## TITLE:

Go with Your Gut: Emotion and Evaluation in Hiring<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT:

In this article, I present hiring as an emotional process rooted in interpersonal evaluation. Drawing from Randall Collins' theory of interaction ritual, I provide a qualitative case study of elite professional service firms to unpack how employers' emotional reactions to applicants in job interviews affect hiring evaluations. To the best of my knowledge, this article is the first empirical investigation of Collins' ideas about emotion as a basis of interpersonal evaluation and social selection. I find that employers used their subjective feelings of excitement and enthusiasm toward candidates—akin to Collins' concept of emotional energy—as metrics of merit and bases for hire. Furthermore, I use my data to develop an original theoretical framework of emotional energy development. In this model, I highlight the qualities that tend to produce, sustain, or inhibit the subjective experience of emotional energy in job interviews and parse out the particular phases of an encounter where energy gains and losses are most consequential for influencing hiring outcomes. I conclude by discussing the implications of my findings for research on hiring and interaction rituals.

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Hiring is a powerful way in which employers shape economic outcomes. Bills (2003:442) notes, “Ultimately...both attaining an occupational status and securing an income are contingent on a hiring transaction.” Despite a surge of research on employers over the past 30 years, our knowledge of how employers hire remains incomplete. Even after accounting for measures of applicants’ human capital, social capital, and demographic traits, quantitative models of hiring still exhibit significant unexplained variation. Consequently, much of what drives employers’ decisions remains to be analyzed by scholars (Heckman and Siegelman 1993).

I argue that much of this gap can be attributed to methodological and data limitations. The bulk of research on hiring uses quantitative data on individuals ultimately hired into an organization that cannot explore how hiring decisions are actually made (Fernandez and Weinberg 1997). Yet, to fully understand how employers hire, it is necessary to study the *process* of decision-making, analyzing how employers evaluate, compare, and select new hires on the ground.

When studying employer hiring, scholars typically analyze individual, organizational, and/or institutional factors (for a review, see Pager and Shepherd 2008). However, more than just candidates, companies, and contexts, hiring is also a fundamentally interpersonal process. Job interviews are crucial components of hiring in many industries, and the subjective impressions developed through these face-to-face encounters are strong drivers of employers’ hiring decisions (Dipboye et al. 1994). Yet, sociologists have historically focused on pre- or post-interview aspects of hiring, such as candidates’ job search strategies (Granovetter 1995), job advertisements (Gorman 2005), employee referrals (Fernandez, Castilla, and Moore 2000), callback rates (Pager 2003; Tilcsik 2011), and/or the composition of individuals who enter an organization (Cohen et al. 1998).

Although scholars in other disciplines—notably, psychology and management—have analyzed job interviews in greater detail, they have focused primarily on investigating the effect of individual-level applicant traits, such as candidates’ sex, race, cognitive skills, or nonverbal styles on

interview scores (Posthuma, Morgeson, and Campion 2002). Perhaps because such studies are often conducted in the laboratory with students simulating the role of decision-makers, employers have received less attention in this literature (Fox and Spector 2000). Yet, given that employers' subjective impressions of candidates are some of the most consequential determinants of interview evaluations, and these perceptions do not consistently correspond to applicants' resume qualifications, demographic characteristics, or cognitive skills (Graves and Powell 1996; Huffcutt 2011), understanding the processes through which real employers evaluate job candidates in interviews is critical for developing more nuanced and externally valid accounts of how employers hire. In this article, I focus on one important but under-theorized element of job interviews: employers' emotional reactions to job candidates.<sup>2</sup>

### **Emotion in Hiring**

Historically, sociologists have downplayed the role of emotions in shaping economic processes (Berezin 2005). Perhaps stemming from a desire to be in stronger dialogue with neoclassical economists, economic sociologists have traditionally portrayed markets as impersonal in nature and emotional processes as “noise” (Bandelj 2009; Zelizer 2009). However, cultural sociologists and sociologists of emotion have shown that emotion and reason are not “separate spheres” or “hostile worlds” (Zelizer 2005) but rather two complementary processes we use in tandem to understand and act within the social world (Thoits 1989; Turner and Stets 2006). Inspired by such insights, over the past 10 years, sociologists have become increasingly interested in understanding how emotions shape behavior in settings ranging from marriage markets to financial markets (Berezin 2009).

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<sup>2</sup> Although there is ongoing debate about the definition of emotion in both sociology and psychology, I use the term here to refer to stimulus-specific, positive, negative, or neutral emotional states experienced in response to a particular job candidate. I use the term emotion as opposed to feelings, which commonly refer to physical drive states (e.g., hunger) or affect or mood, which are considered to be more enduring states not tied to a particular stimulus (e.g., depression) (Thoits 1989). Although physical drive states and affect do affect decision-making, I focus on emotions because they are specific to the job candidate and thus likely play a sociologically meaningful role in how employers evaluate and select new hires.

Despite this surge of interest, discussions of emotion remain relatively absent from the sociological literature on hiring. Employer hiring is typically portrayed as a straightforward process of matching between firms' needs and applicants' skills. For a particular job and applicant pool, employers are portrayed as selecting new hires on the basis of candidates' perceived abilities to successfully execute the work required by the job (Moss and Tilly 2001). Because employers cannot observe productivity directly, they rely on easily observable "signals" that they believe are correlated with underlying productive capacities. The particular signals chosen may vary between contexts but tend to be derived from societal stereotypes, perceptions of the average ability of the demographic group(s) to which a candidate belongs, implicit or explicit biases, and/or personal experience (see Spence 2002; Tilly and Tilly 1998).

The most commonly studied signals in the sociological literature pertain to candidates' cognitive skills, particularly their years of schooling and prior work experience (Farkas 2003). However, employers may also use the presence or absence of referrals to an organization (Fernandez, Castilla, & Moore 2000; Petersen, Saporta, and Seidel 2000) as well as candidates' demographic characteristics (Gorman 2005; Pager 2003) as signals of underlying cognitive and social skills. Consequently, the dominant theory of hiring in sociology portrays employers' decisions as driven by estimates of candidates' human capital, social capital, and demographic characteristics; the residual is typically attributed to error and/or discrimination (Pager and Shepherd 2008).

Such works have provided critical insights into how employers hire. Although human capital, social capital, and demographic characteristics are important determinants of the decision to hire, employers' emotional responses to job candidates also matter. First, a large and growing body of research in psychology and behavioral economics has demonstrated that emotion is a fundamental basis of evaluation and decision-making. How we choose which soap to use, which house to buy, or whom to marry is intimately intertwined not only with how these entities perform but also how they

make us feel (Lerner and Tiedens 2006). Furthermore, emotion is not just something that makes us feel good after the fact about what we have already decided; it is a fundamental basis by which we compare, evaluate the worth of, and select among alternatives in nearly all domains of social life (Keltner and Lerner 2010).<sup>3</sup> In the case of hiring, as those who have ever sat on an academic recruitment committee can attest, subjective *feelings* about job candidates, not just concerns about skill or productivity alone, can sway the direction of a search. Such sentiments are supported by laboratory studies showing that—controlling for candidates’ qualifications—evaluators’ emotional reactions to applicants play a significant role in their hiring decisions (for reviews, see Fox and Spector 2000; Staw et al. 1994). Consequently, employers’ emotional responses to candidates are not just noise or error but rather are meaningful signals they use to ascertain merit and make hiring decisions.

Second, the workplace is not only a site of task execution and skills application but also one of socio-emotional experience (Lawler, Thye, and Yoon 2009; Lively 2006). As Fine (1984:246) notes, “The expressive side of work is as important as the task-oriented component.” Many people spend the bulk of their waking lives at work, and forging positive emotional connections with co-workers can provide employees with enhanced job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and meaning in their lives (Hodson 2001). Moreover, given increases in work hours over the past several decades, we increasingly find our close friends, sexual partners, and even spouses at work. Consequently, work is not only a setting of material production but also one of emotional intimacy (Zelizer 2009). Employers may seek to hire not only competent and trustworthy colleagues but also those with whom they foresee developing intimate, emotional bonds inside and outside the office.

Nevertheless, sociological theories of hiring have heretofore downplayed the role of employers’ emotions in hiring decisions. When emotion does enter sociological discussions of

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<sup>3</sup> Emotion and reason are not orthogonal. Without emotion, individuals tend to suffer significant decrements in decision-making quality and vice versa (Bechara 2004; Damasio 1994).

hiring, it tends to focus on candidates' emotions rather than those of employers; namely, employers may use an applicant's ability to successfully detect, respond to, and regulate his/her own emotions (known in the psychological literature as emotional intelligence) as proxies for underlying social or client skills (Bandelj 2009). Indeed, there are whispers of employers' emotions in hiring. Several qualitative studies have suggested that employers' gut feelings of "chemistry" with job applicants may matter in hiring decisions in labor markets ranging from low-wage restaurant servers to high-end fashion models (e.g., Bills 1988; Mears 2011). Yet, studies have yet to systematically analyze what employers mean by "chemistry," what produces feelings of it in an interview, and how it ultimately effects hiring decisions (Brown 2001). Furthermore, such emotional factors are typically considered "unobservables" in quantitative hiring studies and are excluded from analysis (Pager, Western, and Bonikowski 2009).

Just as hiring scholars have under-theorized emotions, sociologists of emotion have under-theorized hiring. Over the past 30 years, scholars have successfully highlighted the relevance of emotional processes for stratification at work. Although too expansive to systematically review here and skillfully synthesized elsewhere, sociologists of emotion interested in work have focused on addressing three primary issues. A first group of scholars analyze how cultural prescriptions of which emotions are appropriate for employees to feel and display on the job relate to broader patterns of ascriptive inequalities (for a review, see Wharton 2009). A second group illuminates how employees' emotional experiences at work vary by positions of power and status, particularly by sex and race, and how such differences can reinforce existing demographic inequalities within firms (for a review, see Lively 2006). A third group explores how positive and negative emotions experienced in group interaction increase the likelihood of repeated exchange (for a review, see Lawler and Thye 1999).

Despite the great theoretical headway made by this research, sociologists of emotion have predominantly focused on subordinates' experiences of emotion at work rather than how employers—as gatekeepers—use their own emotions to allocate valued career resources, including access to jobs. The few studies that do address hiring focus on candidates' abilities to comply with job-specific “feeling rules” (e.g., Hochschild 1983; Van Maanan and Kunda 1989) rather than employers' emotions as signals of merit and bases for hire.

The goal of this article is to begin to bring employers' emotions into sociological research on hiring. Providing a qualitative case study of elite professional service firms, I investigate the processes through which employers' emotional responses to applicants in job interviews affect real-life hiring evaluations. In doing so, I seek to bring center stage a dimension of the hiring process that is typically sidelined as unobservable by sociological research on hiring. Moreover, although prior laboratory studies have demonstrated *that* emotion matters in hiring, my analysis illuminates how and why emotions influence real-life hiring evaluations, thereby adding important contextual and processual dimensions to research on emotion in job interviews in other disciplines. My goal is not to develop an alternative theory of hiring—employers' emotions certainly work in conjunction with human capital, social capital, and discrimination—but rather to undertake in-depth analysis of an under-theorized but meaningful factor in employers' hiring decisions.

### **Hiring as Interaction Ritual**

Research on emotion in decision-making has typically been the purview of other disciplines (Lawler and Thye 1999). Within sociology, I argue that Randall Collins' theory of interaction ritual (2004) is a useful theoretical starting point for understanding how employers' emotional reactions to job candidates affect hiring evaluations. Collins' work seeks to advance his broader scholarly project of illuminating how micro-social interactions contribute to larger social structures (Collins 1990; Collins 2000). Merging the insights of Durkheim and Goffman, Collins argues that emotions

generated in face-to-face interactions drive the feelings of social solidarity that bind individuals and social institutions together. In particular, he contends that emotions generated through micro-social encounters play an integral role in creating social orders and systems of social inequality.

According to Collins, this occurs because people are stratified not only by structural and material resources but also by the emotional responses they evoke in others. Collins argues that people find encounters with alters who fill them with excitement, enthusiasm, and confidence—feelings he collectively refers to as *emotional energy* (Collins 1990)—to be more rewarding than those that do not elicit such positive emotional responses. As such, individuals gravitate toward people and situations that increase their own stocks of positive emotions and avoid those that do not. Over repeated interactions, such processes provide greater access to opportunities and resources for people who generate a positive emotional “buzz” in others. Collins (2004:xiii) notes:

Privilege and power is not simply a result of unequal material and cultural resources. It is a flow of emotional energy across situations that makes some individuals more impressive, more attractive or dominant; the same situational flow puts other persons in their shadow, narrowing their sources of [emotional energy] to the alternatives of participating as followers or being relegated passively to the sidelines.

Consequently, in Collins’ view, power and status are fundamentally interpersonal and emotional phenomena.

However, Collins asserts that individuals do not merely passively receive emotional flows but rather actively seek emotional energy. According to Collins, we are like moths to a light when it comes to emotional energy. In selecting exchange partners, we use the predicted emotional benefit we will derive from each person as a calculus and choose the individual who provides the most positive emotional boost. He describes, “Emotional energy is the common denominator of all social comparisons and choices. Every alternative is assessed in terms of the amount of emotional energy it carries, whether as a gain or loss” (Collins 2004:172). Thus, in Collins’ view, emotion is a critical basis of interpersonal evaluation and selection, and analyzing the conditions under which people



experience positive or negative emotional responses in interpersonal encounters is crucial for understanding broader patterns of social sorting and stratification<sup>4</sup> in contexts ranging from marriage markets to labor markets. Most relevant to hiring, Collins hypothesizes that job interviews are important settings where emotions serve as vehicles of social selection. In particular, he posits that experiences of excitement and emotional energy play important roles in interview success or failure, with employers gravitating to those applicants who increase their stocks of emotional energy and avoiding those who do not.

Although intriguing, the bulk of Collins' concepts and theoretical propositions have not yet been investigated empirically. In *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004), the most comprehensive articulation of his ideas to date, Collins draws from numerous real-world analogies to illustrate the dynamics of emotion in interaction but does not use data systematically to support his hypotheses, nor does he provide a clear roadmap for doing so. In addition, the *content* of what tends to produce or inhibit emotional energy in particular types of interaction rituals remains unclear. Consequently, despite significant praise for its creativity, the theory has often suffered from criticism that it is not empirically analyzable. In particular, critics have suggested that his central concept—emotional energy—is too abstract and expansive to be operationalized (Fine 2005).

In light of such critiques, until recently, scholars have shied away from examining Collins' ideas empirically. However, over the past 10 years, scholars have successfully investigated how emotional energy flows across encounters relate to social movements (Summers-Effler 2002), educational inequalities (Hallett 2007), and longer-term affective states and inequality such as patterns of depression among women (Simon and Lively 2010). These studies have made important revisions to Collins' original theory including the insights that individuals seek not only to maximize

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<sup>4</sup> In this paper, I use the term stratification to refer to the process by which individuals are sorted into opportunities of unequal material and symbolic resources. This process can result in inequalities by sex, race, and/or other characteristics such as culture and social class (see Lamont and Lareau 1998; Hollander and Howard 2000).

their stocks of positive emotional energy, as hypothesized by Collins, but also to minimize negative emotions (Summers-Effler 2004); emotional energy can be produced not only by feelings of excitement but also by feelings of deference (Hallett 2007); and emotions experienced in micro-social interaction can not only reinforce but also challenge existing social structures and inequalities (Summers-Effler 2002).

In this article, I build upon such works to undertake—to the best of my knowledge—the first systematic empirical investigation of Collins’ ideas about emotion as a basis of interpersonal evaluation and selection in labor markets. Specifically, I provide a qualitative case study of hiring in elite professional service firms to analyze how employers’ emotional responses to candidates affect job interview evaluations.

### *Operationalizing Emotional Energy*

Applying Collins’ ideas, however, requires a working definition of his central variable: emotional energy. The concept, indeed, is a very rich one and, like other multidimensional constructs such as “inequality,” “social class,” or “human capital,” no single measure is likely to capture its meaning in totality. However, in his work Collins describes emotional energy as having a bodily dimension (i.e., posture, gaze, inflection, heart rate) and an interpretive one (i.e., the subjective experience of emotion). Interestingly, these dimensions correspond roughly to sociologists’ understanding of emotions being comprised of physiological components (bodily sensations and gestures) as well as interpretive ones (appraisals of situations and the cultural labels applied to them) (Thoits 1989).<sup>5</sup> When discussing the possibility of testing Collins’ theory, both Collins and his critics have disproportionately focused on the challenges of measuring the former. Although biological techniques for tapping the physical aspects of emotional energy such as fMRI, cortisol testing, skin conductivity, heart rate, gaze analysis, and the like exist and have been used by

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<sup>5</sup> There is ongoing debate as to whether physiological arousal or cognitive appraisal/labeling is primary in emotion formation. The purpose of this paper is not to settle this debate.

experimental psychologists in studies of interaction for years (Robinson, Rogalin, and Smith-Lovin 2004), sociologists have criticized them for their high cost and potentially disruptive effect on naturalistic social interaction. This focus on the bodily dimension of emotional energy is somewhat surprising not only because modern technology provides opportunities for its measurement but also because it is the second dimension—*the subjective and interpretative experience of emotion*—that (1) constitutes a significant portion of Collins’ analysis and (2) sociologists, psychologists, and behavioral economists have demonstrated plays a crucial role in orienting action (Clore and Storbeck 2006; Turner and Stets 2006). How we label an emotion is critical for shaping whether and how we act on it. For example, even if physiological arousal is really due to fear, if we label it as stemming from romantic love, it will affect whether we run toward or away from another.

The interpretive dimension of emotion is particularly salient in hiring because it is not interviewers’ heart rates, cortisol levels, bodily distance, or even the objective facts of an interaction that they record on written interview forms and use to craft arguments for or against candidates in group deliberations, but rather their subjective interpretations of interviews and candidates.<sup>6</sup> This second but crucial dimension of emotional energy is indeed accessible to sociologists. Cultural sociologists have successfully used qualitative techniques to study the interpretive dimensions of interpersonal evaluation and selection in other real-life contexts such as academic peer review panels (Lamont 2009) and elite college admissions committees (Stevens 2007).

Thus, taking the interpretive dimension of emotional energy as my focus of inquiry, I operationalize emotional energy as evaluators’ reports of the presence or absence of excitement or enthusiasm (Collins 2004) as well as deference (Hallett 2007) felt in response to a particular job candidate. In the case of hiring, I focus on evaluators’ reports of being “pumped up” or “drained”

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<sup>6</sup> Moreover, people typically draw from cognitive attributions and interpretations when making complex, high-stakes decisions and those where there is a sense of personal accountability (Leach and Tiedens 2004), such the hiring decisions analyzed here.

of emotional energy rather than those of job candidates, because it is the impressions of the former that are most consequential for employers' decisions.<sup>7</sup> This definition is no doubt imperfect, but it is a first step toward understanding how employers' emotional responses to job applicants contribute to hiring evaluations.

### **Outline of Article**

In analyzing how employers' emotions affect hiring evaluations, I proceed as follows. First, I introduce the case of elite professional service firms and describe my data collection and analysis procedures. Second, I discuss how—consistent with prior laboratory research—elite employers used their emotional reactions to candidates, most commonly feelings of excitement akin to Collins' original concept of emotional energy, as important signals of merit and bases of hiring evaluations. Third, given that uses of emotion are socially and culturally embedded (Lively 2006), I highlight factors contributing to the strong use of emotion in hiring in these firms. Fourth, I extend Collins' work by using my empirical data to propose an original theoretical model of emotional energy development, highlighting specific qualities that tend to produce, sustain, or inhibit feelings emotional energy in job interviews, and parsing out the phases where energy gains or losses seem to be most consequential for influencing hiring evaluations. Although based on the job interview setting, this model holds the potential to inform future cases of emotion in interpersonal evaluation more broadly.

### **CASE SELECTION**

I provide a qualitative case study of hiring in elite professional firms. Although not without limitations, case studies are particularly valuable for unpacking the how and why of complex social processes that unravel over time (Yin 2003). Moreover, qualitative research is particularly suited to “the assessment of the mechanisms specified in existing theory, to the production of alternative

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<sup>7</sup> However, one can imagine that candidates' emotions influence their attraction to firms and their likelihood of accepting or rejecting job offers.

explanations, and to the generation of new theory” (Ragin, Nagel, and White 2004:12), such as investigating how employers’ emotional reactions to job candidates influence hiring evaluations in light of existing theories of hiring and interaction rituals.

### **Wall Street versus Main Street**

I focus exclusively on hiring in elite professional service firms.<sup>8</sup> Although a focus on elite employers constrains generalizability, it also offers distinct theoretical advantages. Most studies of hiring focus on entry to low-wage and/or low-skill labor markets. While such analyses are undoubtedly important, given that economic stratification is driven not only by under-privilege but also by privilege, in order to fully understand how employers contribute to labor market sorting, it is also necessary to understand entry to highly paid and prestigious job tracks. Analyzing access to elite jobs is particularly important given that the top 10 percent of income earners has disproportionately driven economic inequality in America over the past 35 years (Atkinson, Piketty, and Saez 2011). As hiring practices tend to be labor-market specific (Bills 2003), it is likely that hiring processes differ between Wall Street and Main Street; both warrant empirical attention.

Elite professional service firms represent a particularly fertile ground for analyzing the role of emotion in hiring. Entry-level positions typically require prestigious university credentials, and the majority of applications are solicited directly through university career centers rather than informal networks. As a result, applicant pools are pre-screened, and many traditional structural and status differences between applicant groups are minimized, although not eradicated. Consequently, studying this labor market provides unique opportunities to analyze how employers make “fine distinctions” (Stevens 2007) between candidates in the absence of stark differences in human and/or social capital and make final hiring decisions. Thus, a focus on elite employers, even if less generalizable, allows for analysis of emotion under the microscope. Although it may magnify the

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<sup>8</sup> *Professional service firm* is a category used by practitioners and scholars to describe businesses—most commonly law, investment, and consulting firms—that sell customized advice to clients.

relative importance of emotional reactions in the decision to hire, it can also reveal important insights about the role of emotion in hiring to a level of granularity that might not be accessible in other settings.

### **Elite Professional Service Firms**

I analyze hiring for entry-level professional positions in elite investment banks, law firms, and management consulting firms.

#### *Similarities*

Rewards. Jobs in these firms hold unparalleled material rewards for young employees, and the economic stakes for applicants are high. Joining one of these firms catapults recent graduates into the top 10 percent of household incomes in the United States. These salaries are double to quadruple the amounts earned by graduates from the same universities entering other jobs at the same time (Guren and Sherman 2008; Zimmerman 2009). Additionally, as jobs early in the life course play a critical role in shaping future economic and occupational trajectories (Blau and Duncan 1967) and “doing time” within these firms is increasingly required for senior positions not only within corporations but also within the government and nonprofit sectors (Kalfayan 2009), these jobs can be thought of as contemporary gateways to the American economic elite.

Work. Entry-level professionals execute a combination of research, teamwork, and client interaction; analytical and interpersonal skills are key job requirements. Professionals in these occupations work with similar (if not the same) clients, most commonly large corporations. They face tight deadlines and highly demanding (65+ hours per week) work schedules.

Recruitment. Firms hire the bulk of new professional employees through annual, “on-campus recruitment” programs operated with career services offices at elite universities. Firms seek to create an incoming class of new hires that enter the firm as a group and undergo intensive on-the-job training and professional socialization together. Firms identify a set of universities where they

accept resumes and interview candidates, most commonly through national prestige rankings. At these campuses any student may apply. Competition is largely closed to students who do not attend a prestigious school (Rivera 2011). After an initial resume screen,<sup>9</sup> most commonly on the basis of average grades and extracurricular activities, firms choose a sub-group of applicants for first-round interviews where applicants meet with one or two firm employees for 20 to 45 minutes. Firms typically interview dozens of candidates from a single school back-to-back in a campus career center or nearby hotel. It is crucial to note that candidates are interviewed by revenue-generating professionals (rather than HR representatives) who have undergone minimal training in interviewing and could potentially work closely with candidates who are hired. Applicants who receive favorable evaluations in first-round interviews participate in a final round of three to six back-to-back interviews either on campus or in the firm's office. Recruiting committees typically weigh interviews more than resumes in final offer decisions.

Candidates. Firms attract similar applicant pools. The majority of students at top-tier undergraduate and professional schools apply for these jobs. Undergraduate, business school and law school students often apply simultaneously to banks and consulting firms; elite undergraduates frequently debate among entering banking, consulting, and law school upon graduation; and newly minted JDs increasingly seek employment in banks and consulting firms (Leonhardt 2011; Rimer 2008).

### *Differences*

Despite these similarities, these types of firms vary along several dimensions. Although I discuss differences and their effect on evaluation extensively elsewhere, I focus on one important difference between firms in this article: interview format. Firms vary in the degree to which interviews test technical versus interpersonal skills. Law firm interviews focus almost exclusively on

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<sup>9</sup> The most elite law schools are exceptions; career offices force firms to interview all applicants who sign up.

testing candidates' interpersonal skills through informal conversations about law school or extracurriculars. Banks follow a similar format but also test candidates' basic familiarity with financial principles. Although such probes are typically rudimentary (e.g., "What is NASDAQ?" "How do you value a company?"), they incorporate a basic level of job-relevant knowledge into interviews. Consulting firms employ the most technical evaluations, consisting of a brief conversational interview, similar to those in banks and law firms, followed by a 20 to 30 minute "case" where interviewers describe a hypothetical business problem and ask applicants to talk about how they might solve it. Such variation can illuminate important links between job interview formats and the role of emotion in candidate evaluation.

## **METHODS**

To investigate the role of emotion in hiring, I conducted both interviews and participant observation. Because this article focuses on evaluators' subjective experiences of emotion, I draw the bulk of analysis presented here from interviews—which are particularly suited to the study of social processes and subjective interpretations (Weiss 1994)—but use fieldwork to supplement participants' narratives with information about evaluative contexts and behaviors.

### **Interviews**

I conducted 120 semi-structured interviews with professionals involved in undergraduate and graduate hiring decisions in top-tier firms<sup>10</sup> (40 per industry). Participants included hiring partners, managing directors, mid-level employees who conduct interviews and screen resumes, and HR managers who provided details about the administrative aspects of recruitment. I recruited participants through stratified sampling from public directories of recruiting contacts, university alumni directories, and multi-sited referral chains. As elite populations are often difficult to access, referrals and my university and prior corporate affiliations were helpful in gaining consent and

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<sup>10</sup> I identified firms on the basis of national and major market prestige rankings.



building rapport with participants. Interviews lasted approximately between 40 and 90 minutes, took place at the time and location of the participant's choosing, and were tape-recorded and transcribed word-for-word when participants consented. Given that the bulk of firms are headquartered in Manhattan, I temporarily relocated to New York to facilitate data collection.

Following Lamont's (2009) protocol for probing evaluative criteria, I asked evaluators specific questions about what qualities they look for and about candidates whom they recently interviewed. Additionally, I asked evaluators who formally screened resumes to verbally evaluate a set of mock candidate profiles. I presented four profiles—Blake, Jonathan, Julia, and Sarah—to all participants. In crafting these resumes, I composed applications that were relatively standard for firms in these industries; all had attended at least one selective university, met firms' common grade floor, had some prior work experience, and were involved in activities on campus. However, the candidates varied by sex, ethnicity, educational prestige, G.P.A., prior employer, and extracurriculars. Because more than one characteristic varied between resumes, the profiles were not intended as an experimental manipulation but rather as a springboard for discussion that illuminated processes of criteria deployment and interpretation in real time (see Online Supplement for resumes).

### **Participant Observation**

Over nine months in 2006 and 2007, I conducted fieldwork within the recruiting department of one elite professional service firm, which I refer to by the pseudonym Holt Halliday, or simply Holt. My role was that of a participant observer. Given my prior professional experience, I was brought on through a personal connection as an unpaid "recruiting intern" to help execute recruitment events. In exchange, Holt granted me permission to observe its recruitment process for research purposes. During these months, I shadowed evaluators through full-time and summer associate recruitment from an elite professional school. Due to IRB restrictions and Holt's request, I was unable to sit in on interviews. However, I attended recruitment events, interacted with

candidates, debriefed evaluators about candidates after interviews, and sat in on group deliberations where candidates were discussed and ultimately selected. In addition to informing my interview protocol, such observation enabled examination of candidate selection in action and could reveal patterns outside the awareness of individual evaluators. Although I did not observe interviews directly, witnessing how employers discussed candidates and made decisions behind closed doors provided crucial insights into the hiring process. As noted earlier, how we interpret events plays a crucial role in orienting action (Turner and Stets 2006). Similarly, evaluators record subjective impressions—not objective details—of interviews on written interview reports and use these interpretations to argue for or against candidates in hiring committee deliberations, which I did observe. Although I observed only one firm, these data represent a launching point for understanding basic features of assessment.

### **Data Analysis**

I coded interview transcripts and field notes for criteria and mechanisms of candidate evaluation. I developed coding categories inductively and refined them in tandem with data analysis (Charmaz 2001). In primary coding rounds, I coded mentions of *any* criteria or mechanism that participants used to evaluate candidates. In inductive fashion, I did not set out to analyze emotion, nor did my interview protocol contain any questions specifically about emotion. In fact, I originally intended to study gender in hiring. However, as is common practice in semi-structured interviewing, if participants brought up new concepts—such as emotion—spontaneously, I followed up with probes. After noticing the high frequency with which employers spontaneously used their emotional responses to candidates as bases of evaluation when first coding the data, I developed secondary codes to capture how feelings about a candidate enhanced or inhibited evaluation, a coding category I labeled “emotion.” Within this category, I developed additional codes referring to (1) uses of emotion, defined as how employers used emotion in candidate evaluation; (2) timing of emotion,

defined as when in an interview or the evaluation process they reported using their emotions; (3) descriptions of particular emotions, such as excitement, boredom, deference, or anger; (4) sources of emotion, defined as the qualities or interactions that elicited particular emotional responses; and (5) meanings employers attributed to the presence or absence of particular emotional responses. I then quantified and compared code frequencies using the data analysis software ATLAS-ti.

As inductive qualitative research consists of an iterative relationship between theory and data analysis, and evidence found in the field can be used to generate new theories, revise existing ones, and develop middle-range theories (Charmaz 2001; Miles and Huberman 2001), while coding the data I began to notice similarities and differences between my data and Collins' theories. I examined my codes and frequencies in light of Collins' ideas and used them to develop the original, theoretical model of emotional energy development presented here.

## **GO WITH YOUR GUT**

I argue that in addition to being a process of skills sorting, hiring is also an emotional process. Whereas traditional accounts of occupational attainment (Blau and Duncan 1967) and hiring have treated employers' emotions as peripheral to processes of labor market sorting, evaluators described using their emotional responses to candidates as a crucial means of ascertaining merit in hiring. As indicated in Figure 1, nearly 80 percent of participants in research interviews spontaneously reported using their own emotions to evaluate job candidates; using emotion as a means of evaluation was most common in consulting. Whereas using traditionally-studied human capital signals—namely educational prestige and a baseline of average grades as well as the less-studied signal of extracurricular pursuits—were the most common ways evaluators screened resumes to compose interview pools, emotion was the second most common means they used to distinguish between candidates at the job interview stage, ranking only behind homophily in prevalence and frequency.

[INSERT FIGURE 1]

Evaluators insisted that merit was not simply something that they could cognitively ascertain from candidates' "paper" resume qualifications, such as schooling or work experience, but rather something that they felt. "Gut," as evaluators commonly referred to their personal emotional responses to candidates, was a crucial way they evaluated and compared candidates at the job interview stage. When describing how she evaluates candidates, a legal recruitment director (white, female) summarized, "A lot of it is complete gut instinct." In fact, many likened the interview process to the selection of romantic partners, arguing that it could not be boiled down to reason or objective measures alone. As summarized by one banker (white, female), "It's like dating... You meet a lot of people and then sometimes there's just chemistry. You just know it in your gut. We try to make it 'objective' by having trainings to tell us what to ask and what not to ask and by having evaluations, but ultimately it's just something you *feel*."

Although evaluators used a number of emotions when evaluating job candidates, as noted in Figure 2, reports of excitement—similar to Collins' original conception of emotional energy—were most common, followed by feelings of deference.

[INSERT FIGURE 2]

Evaluators described how perceptions of competence, although necessary, were insufficient for giving a candidate a positive hiring recommendation. Candidates also had to generate strong, positive emotions, most often excitement, from their evaluators. A banker (white, male) explained, "Most of the people that are borderline for me...they don't really get me excited about them." A consulting partner (white, female) concurred, "You see people who are like...there is nothing

wrong... they did a solid job but there wasn't a spark." Without generating such positive, emotional sparks in at least one evaluator, even a highly competent candidate was unlikely to receive an offer. A law firm partner (white, female) summarized, "You see people who have got the grades and they have great resumes and good references but you know people are like, 'Where's the enthusiasm?'... Yeah, they got good grades in our range, the resume's solid, but they don't get offers at our firm because it's like, 'Oh well, there's no enthusiasm for this person.'" An attorney (Asian, female) elaborated on the tension between competence and excitement in selecting new hires:

I once read this newspaper article about the Bush-Gore election about how the reason Bush won the election was just because most Americans thought that Gore is someone who is really smart but Bush is someone that they'd rather have a beer with. And I think that quality—it's something that you can't explain or articulate—plays into every interview, whether a person is willing to admit it or not. You think, "Is this someone I want to hang out with? Just someone who'd I'd rather go and get a beer with after work?" They need to be able to *light up* an interview like that; they have to make me think that they're *cool*... you have to be excited about them.

It is important to note that excitement differs from liking. Excitement is generally a forward-looking state in which one anticipates receiving future social or material rewards (Johnson, Ford, and Kaufman 2000), whereas liking is a mild, more generalized positive evaluative sentiment towards another (Thoits 1989; Turner and Stets 2006). Moreover, although they may co-exist, liking and excitement do not always co-occur. To use the types of dating analogies common among my participants, in the trope of the "nice" romantic prospect, we may like someone without being excited by them. Conversely, in the case of attraction to the "bad" or "dangerous" partner, we may experience intense excitement without stable feelings of liking or respect. Furthermore, my evaluators discussed how, while common, liking was not a strong enough emotion to motivate action. A lawyer (white, female) explained, "Most of the people I interview I like. But they don't overwhelm me either way....there has to be something that makes me excited about them [for me] to pass them on." Consequently, although evaluators also used liking in evaluation, feelings of excitement were described as being more crucial in candidate evaluation because they had a stronger

emotional intensity. To summarize, consistent with prior laboratory research and Collins' hypothesis, evaluators used their emotional reactions to applicants, particularly their subjective feelings of excitement, as signals of merit in hiring evaluations.

### **Why Gut?**

Evaluators believed that using emotion in candidate evaluation was not only inevitable, commonly referring to it in terms of “human nature” or “instinct,” but also an appropriate and effective tool for assessing merit. In particular, many believed that their emotional reactions to candidates were *more reliable* predictors of future job performance than conventional measures such as grades, standardized test scores, or prior work experience. Why did evaluators place such a premium on their own emotional responses? Although emotions likely play a role in all labor markets where evaluators have multiple individuals who pass a basic threshold of competence and where evaluators have discretion about whom they hire, I argue that gut was such a salient basis of candidate evaluation in elite firms because of shared cultural beliefs about what constitutes merit and how best to evaluate it as well as firms' organizational cultures.

#### *“A Crap Shoot”*

Although sociological theories of hiring often portray hiring evaluations as being driven primarily by signals of cognitive skills listed on resumes, such as grades and schooling, like many nonelite employers (Rosenbaum and Binder 1997), evaluators in my sample overwhelmingly did not believe that traditional resume characteristics such as grades, coursework, or prior work experience were reliable predictors of future job success.<sup>11</sup> Many distrusted these metrics because they believed that the majority of applicants—even those who had strong resumes—did not possess the necessary technical skills to do the job in question. All three types of firms seek generalist candidates from elite universities, which tend to have more abstract, liberal arts-based curricula. Although evaluators

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<sup>11</sup> Because firms typically do not track the relationship between resume characteristics and future job performance, these impressions were based primarily on evaluators' personal theories.

believed that attendance at such universities was a crucial measure of a candidate's "raw intellectual horsepower" and moral character, they did not believe that the content of undergraduate or graduate education was itself useful for the realities of work within their organizations. Consequently, although evaluators believed that a candidate's academic track record was helpful for setting minimum cognitive standards and narrowing the pool, they also felt that it was unreliable for predicting future performance. As summarized by a banker (white, male), "A resume just can't tell you a whole lot." In the minds of evaluators, emotion provided an alternative assessment tool. An attorney (Hispanic, male) explained, "You kind of have a crap shoot every time so you just have to trust your gut."

*"Above the Bar"*

Elite employers also stress emotion in evaluation because they can. Firms in these industries have more applicants each year than they can hire; many have lower acceptance rates than Ivy League colleges. Consequently, they have the luxury of being discerning in resume screens and interviews. Even after narrowing applications by educational prestige, a grade floor, and extracurriculars, firms still needed to cut down the applicant pool, commonly by more than half. Employers could have screened more intensively on class rank, relevant coursework, relevant work experience, writing skills, standardized test performance, or diversity—as applicants varied along these lines—but they did not. Part of this was driven by the aforementioned distrust of resumes. But part was also due to practical constraints. Recall that evaluators were not HR officials but revenue-generating professionals who balanced recruitment with full-time client work. Thus, the tradeoff between time, effort, and evaluative rigor was top-of-mind for employers; "gut" was perceived as a fast and easy way to distinguish between multiple applicants who were "above the bar." A consultant (Indian, male) explained, "There are many more qualified candidates than there are positions in firms. And you know while I don't think it's always fair to base this judgment on how you feel...I

can't think of a more efficient way of doing it because you know you have to balance the ability to evaluate a candidate with time." As such, using emotion was believed to be an efficient means of winnowing a pre-screened pool.

*"It's Like a Marriage"*

Third, evaluators believed that the ability to evoke a positive emotional response in others was a valuable quality in and of itself, one that they often found to be more meaningful than technical skills. Junior and mid-level employees in these firms work extremely long hours, often in teams. Due to late nights and weekends spent in the office or on the road, evaluators approached candidate assessment with the notion that they were selecting not just co-workers but also members of their primary social network. As such, they sought to hire not just competent colleagues but also enjoyable friends and playmates that made them feel good inside and outside of the office. A consultant (white, male) summarized, "It's like a marriage. Would you marry someone who was perfect for you on paper but didn't make you feel good? Of course you wouldn't. You'd be miserable for the rest of your life."

Similarly, evaluators believed that in order to be effective with clients, candidates needed to be not only professional and respectful (qualities that evaluators reported could be "coached") but also "fun" to interact with, a quality that was "un-trainable." They used their personal emotional responses to candidates as proxies for those of clients. As summarized by a consulting partner (white, female), "We can see from the paper...their analytical skills and their intelligence. That's all you can really judge there. What you can't judge is...how comfortable you will be with them...how comfortable you'll be sending them to the client...how fun they will be to go to dinner with...Interviews allow us a little bit of a glimpse into what they are like as a *person*." Thus, emotion was not just noise but rather a meaningful quality that evaluators prized for its relevance to both their own professional and personal lives and the work performed within their organizations.



*In Gut We Trust*

Experiences, expressions, and uses of emotion are embedded in cultural norms about what types of emotions are appropriate for whom in a given context (Lively 2006). Although sociologists of emotion more commonly talk about “feeling rules” and norms concerning the emotional life of members of particular demographic groups, organizational and industry cultures can also shape how emotions are used and expressed in a given context (Hochschild 1983; Van Maanan and Kunda 1989). In many ways, contemporary American corporate culture valorizes emotion as a basis of decision-making. Inspired by psychological research showing that emotion can facilitate judgment (e.g., Damasio 1994) and a number of high-profile CEOs who have publicly attributed their most successful business decisions to “gut,” an entire industry has emerged within the management world that touts the intelligence of emotions (Bandelj 2009). A slew of popular press books, management publications, and self-help gurus depict going with your gut as a more efficient and effective way of making business decisions than systematic reasoning (Hayashi 2001). Many corporate managers have internalized this notion; one survey estimated that 45 percent of managers reported relying more on their gut than on facts and figures in running their businesses (Bonabeau 2003). However, some scholars have suggested that the valorization of emotion in decision-making—particularly feelings of excitement and enthusiasm (Keltner and Lerner 2010)—is not unique to the corporate realm but rather is a broader feature of contemporary American culture (Ehrenreich 2009).

In the firms under study, the idea that emotion provided a “smart” if not “smarter” way of making decisions manifested itself in both employees’ attitudes toward what constitutes appropriate evaluation and the very structure of the hiring process. Evaluators frequently described candidate assessment as “an art, not science,” with emotional reactions being more valid judgments of quality than standardized human capital metrics such as credentials, grades, coursework, or prior work experience. In fact, firms purposely structured evaluation around the principle that merit was best

assessed subjectively through the eyes and heart of the beholder. Although firms set out specific qualities that evaluators should assess such as intelligence, leadership, and communication skills, they typically left the measurement and weighting of these criteria up to the discretion of individual evaluators. Additionally, hiring decisions were based primarily on interviewers' subjective impressions of candidates from job interviews rather than absolute resume qualifications. A law firm partner (white, female) described why her firm leaves evaluation open, asserting, "Our attorneys bring their own styles to interviews...We trust their instincts."

Evaluators were adamant that candidate quality was best assessed subjectively. Some justified this by insisting that sticking to resume achievements could lead them to miss out on great candidates who, for some reason, fell below threshold on these metrics (what some evaluators termed a "diamond in the rough"). A banker (white, female) related, "I think I can pick out great people...You shouldn't shun someone based on what's on paper. There's plenty of people I've interviewed [that are] complete career switchers and don't have the experience but I've just gotten like good gut feelings about them." Thus, corporate and organizational cultures contributed to the trust placed in "gut" in hiring. In fact, when I asked them why they trusted their gut feelings, several respondents directly cited popular press books on the wisdom of emotions, such as Malcolm Gladwell's *Blink*.

#### *The Limits of Gut*

Although the majority of evaluators viewed the use of emotion as functional in candidate selection, a few found this practice problematic. Several participants admitted that the use of gut left room for bias of a conscious or unconscious nature to creep in. Such concerns are warranted by scholarship suggesting that subjective evaluation techniques, such as the uses of "gut" described here, are more prone to implicit, subtle, or explicit bias on the basis of race and/or sex (Reskin and McBrier 2000). Yet, evaluators did not see clear alternatives. As one banker summarized of the use

of emotion in evaluation, “It’s not fair, but you can’t avoid it.” Moreover, those who were most emphatic about the downsides of gut were HR representatives who, although charged with overseeing the administrative aspects of recruitment, have minimal decision-making authority in these types of firms (Rivera 2012).

### **Emotional Energy in Job Interviews**

To recap, consistent with both prior psychological research and Collins’ hypothesis, employers used their emotional responses to job candidates, particularly the presence or absence of feelings of excitement—akin to Collins’ original conception of emotional energy—as signals of merit and bases of evaluation in job interviews. They did so because of cultural beliefs about what constituted merit and how best to assess it combined with the practical demands of real-life evaluation. Yet, how did such feelings of excitement and “chemistry,” which were so crucial for candidates’ fates in the hiring process, develop in job interviews?

Collins contends that positive emotional energy will develop in an interaction when participants share (1) physical co-presence; (2) a boundary from outsiders; (3) mutual focus; and (4) shared initial emotion. Without all four dynamics, he argues, encounters are likely to fall flat from the start and are difficult if not impossible to recoup. By design, job interviews fulfill the first three of these criteria by placing two people in an isolated room for the purpose of joint evaluation. But how does the subjective experience of emotional energy develop within a given interaction? On this subject, Collins remains elusive. He gives numerous anecdotes of successful and failed interactions and suggests some intriguing hypotheses, but does not systematically theorize how subjective experiences of emotional energy develop in specific encounters. In this section, I use my data to propose an original theoretical model of *emotional energy development* in job interviews (see Figure 3), highlighting the qualities that tend to enhance or diminish interviewees’ subjective feelings of being

pumped up or drained of emotional energy. This model both revises and extends Collins' ideas about emotion in interpersonal evaluation.

[INSERT FIGURE 3]

In this model, I argue that the level of emotional energy generated by an encounter actually begins prior to face-to-face interaction. Evaluators develop an *energy expectation* of how rewarding they believe interacting with a candidate will be. They subsequently confirm or revise this estimate into an overall *energy impression* on the basis of initial ice-breaking conversation, which in these firms typically focuses on factors not directly related to the job in question. Formal *performance evaluation* of a candidate's competence occurs after this impression has been formed and is strongly colored by such impressions. After the interview, the *energy trace* that lingers in evaluators' perceptions influences how they recall and rank candidates and contributes to an *energy pulse* that affects their willingness to advocate for a candidate in deliberations. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate how evaluators' subjective experiences of particular emotions wax and wane in job interviews. I now analyze each phase of emotional energy development in depth.

[INSERT FIGURE 4]

[INSERT FIGURE 5]

### **Phase 1: Energy Expectation**

In contrast to Collins' view, the level of emotional energy produced by an encounter actually begins to develop *prior* to face-to-face interaction. When scanning resumes for conversation topics immediately before meeting a candidate, evaluators reported developing an *energy expectation* of how exciting or enjoyable interacting with that applicant would be. To participate in on-campus

recruitment for these firms, applicants must list on their resumes not only their educational and work experiences but also their extracurricular activities and leisure interests. Evaluators reported creating a “rough sketch” of candidates in their minds based on information gleaned from resumes. Evaluators’ assessments of mock candidate profiles were particularly useful for illuminating this initial stage of energy formation. An attorney (female, black) contrasted the energy expectations she developed for two mock candidates, which she formed largely on the basis of her interpretation of their social backgrounds. “Blake,” an investment banker from the Northeast, did not provide an initial energy boost:

When I look at a resume, I try to create a face. I mean honestly this is like a white man who I view as probably like 6’2” and I say that because he played lacrosse and he’s worked in consulting or investment banking, which also leads me to believe that he’s like white...and he certainly looks good on paper, I mean he went to Exeter, which leads me to believe that his family has money....But he doesn’t talk about being active in things in law school....was he doing anything with himself aside from studying and playing beer pong?

She contrasted him to Julia, a Hispanic female who provided her with a distinctive energy boost based not only on her academic achievements but also her less affluent upbringing and interest in public service, an extracurricular passion she shared:

Wow...her pedigree is fantastic. She went to Yale Law School which is to me the epitome of all that is good with the law, and Harvard summa. Valedictorian and National Merit Scholar from Roxbury High. So then that probably tells a little bit more about her background because she’s from Roxbury [a “rough” neighborhood in Boston], which is really impressive and would then lead me to want to give her a shot more than Blake. Teach for America [*her face lights up*], *this* is the type of experience that I was talking about...like there’s something that we can *really talk about*...I like that kind of thing. And in addition to, oh and then she worked at the battered women’s shelter...so she is fantastic, she is number one for sure.

Research on *expectation states* (Berger et al. 1977) shows that expectations about performance, often associated with status characteristics such as sex and race, significantly influence evaluations of competence. In addition to such influences (note that the above attorney mentioned sex, race, and class when ranking the resumes), I argue that expectations of enjoyment also play a meaningful role in evaluation. Energy expectations were distinct from performance expectations and often deviated

from them. For example, evaluators frequently expected that “nerds” or “bookworms”—individuals who had impressive academic credentials but lacked “exciting” or “interesting” extracurricular experiences—would be “duds,” “boring worker bees,” or even “corporate drones” who would be “dull” to interact with in the interview or at work, if hired. Illustrating the difference between competence and energy expectations, the majority of evaluators believed that Julia was the “smartest” candidate, but they varied wildly in how enjoyable they perceived interacting with her would be and how highly they ranked her versus other mock candidates. Whereas the attorney quoted previously found her to be extraordinarily exciting and ranked her first, a consultant (white, female) anticipated she would be “scary” if not “absolutely terrifying.” A banker (white, male), on the other hand, found her to be lackluster, “These types of extracurriculars like volunteering and tutoring, not to discount what she likes to do, but they seem sort of *canned* as opposed to like something like watching sports or I don’t know something on there that shows it’s like a real person.” He ranked her last of all the mock candidates. Consequently, the specific characteristics that energized evaluators varied by their personal backgrounds, tastes, and experiences. However, similarity, status, vividness, and the impressions of other evaluators were common sources of positive energy expectations.

### *Similarity*

As Collins notes and a large body of research in psychology supports (see Byrne 1971), similarity is an important basis of attraction and affiliation. However, in contrast to traditional sociological accounts of the role of similarity in hiring that discuss similarities in visible demographic characteristics (Gorman 2005), evaluators described how discovering common extracurricular interests when scanning a candidate’s resume before the interview was a particularly potent source of energy expectations. Although I discuss the evaluative benefits of similarity extensively in a different article, a banker (white, female) illustrated how shared extracurricular activities could yield

excitement prior to interaction. When reviewing the mock resume of “Jonathan” her face lit up as she exclaimed, “Ooh traveling, running, all things that I like! I’d definitely interview him” and moved his resume to the top of her stack. A consultant (white, female) displayed similar enthusiasm when reviewing Julia’s resume: “She’s into social enterprise stuff. I *really* dig that. She’s in” and ranked her first of all the mock candidates.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, a lack of commonalities could contribute to feelings of boredom or energy drain before an interview began. An attorney (white, male) described one candidate who filled him with a sense of dread from the start: “I looked at her resume a few minutes before she came in as I always do to figure out what I was going to ask her. But there was nothing on there that I could relate to. I looked at her activities and immediately knew that we’d have *nothing to talk about.*”<sup>13</sup>

#### *High-Status Activities*

Although excitement was the most common source of emotional energy, consistent with Hallett (2007), feelings of deference also produced emotional boosts in evaluation. Evaluators described being pumped up by candidates who “wowed” them, or who induced feelings admiration or awe. In the expectation formation phase, these feelings most commonly arose from candidates who displayed particular types of high-status accomplishments. Nationally or internationally ranked athletes elicited especially strong, positive energy expectations. A consultant (white, male) asserted, “If you’re the captain of a Division I sports team, then I’m really impressed. Particularly if they’ve won the national championships, it makes you automatically interesting.” In his reaction to mock

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<sup>12</sup>Note that these types of energy expectations could occur not only for shared extracurriculars but also shared demographic characteristics. However, it is important to note that sex and/or race similarities did not consistently relate to energy reported in this phase of the evaluation. Rather, sex and race were more commonly discussed in terms of developing performance expectations.

<sup>13</sup> The similarities that provided boosts in this stage were highly individualized and based on the evaluator’s own biography. It wasn’t just participation in any extracurricular activity or even one that evaluators’ believed was job-relevant but rather one that the evaluator found exciting based on personal participation in it. For example, former athletes—like the participant above—reported being particularly energized by candidates who had also been varsity athletes in college versus other competitive extracurriculars. Some were only excited by their own sport.

candidate Sarah, a different consultant (Asian, male) illustrated how this boost was not limited to male candidates or participation in team sports: “Top player in the country for squash is *really* interesting, I just think that’s super hard to do...I would definitely want to interview her...Top player in the country in a varsity sport is actually something that I always give a lot of respect to.” However, such energy boosts were not simply about being in the presence of a winner, a team player, or someone with a high work ethic but rather were about participation in high-status activities that evaluators found to be viscerally exciting. For example, other types of national prizes that were arguably more job-relevant but less emotionally arousing (e.g., speech and debate, math, moot court champion) did not result in the same affective boosts as accomplished athletes. Athletic honors—even for individual rather than team sports—were described as “fantastic,” “cool,” and “amazing,” while other recognitions were frequently criticized for being “resume” or “filler” activities and their possessors judged as “boring.”

Less frequently, evaluators reported experiencing emotional boosts in this phase from candidates who had high-status credentials. Candidates who exhibited flawless “pedigrees,” defined as the prestige of their educational and work experiences, could generate positive energy expectations from evaluators. However, this category of boost was very narrowly defined—it primarily referred to candidates who had attended only Harvard, Yale, or Princeton as undergraduates; had earned their MBAs at Harvard or Stanford or their JDs at Yale; and had worked at Goldman Sachs, McKinsey, or the most elite New York law firms (e.g., Cravath, Skadden, and Wachtell)—and represented only a fraction of candidates. This sort of energy expectation was tied to performance expectations, as one consultant (white, female) explained: “They must be a rock star to get through their [elite institutions] process!” But it also provided an affective boost derived from deference. Upon reading mock candidate Julia’s resume, a banker (white, male) exclaimed, “She graduated from Yale *summa cum laude*—I don’t think I know anyone who’s done that!”



### *Vividness*

Net of their similarity and status, unique or vivid activities could also contribute to high energy expectations. Evaluators most commonly described this in terms of bizarre or unusual extracurricular activities. They reported anticipating the interaction, being excited to talk to them, as opposed to the feelings of boredom or neutrality that typically accompanied the beginning of “yet another interview.” An attorney (Asian, male) explained, “I find it exciting if someone had something *interesting* on their resume....Like they did a tour in the military or they were a cattle rancher.” A consultant (Indian, female) recalled one candidate whom she was particularly excited to meet: “She runs a marathon in less than three hours. That’s pretty amazing! You know someone else may be a singer or songwriter...Just something interesting, that you know, you read it and it’s like, ‘Cool!’” Without such vivid activities, candidates ran the risk of being perceived as “dull,” “bland” or “ordinary” by evaluators and suffering from a lower energy expectation from the start.

### *Others’ Impressions*

In addition to resume information, word-of-mouth could also contribute to energy expectations. Evaluators who were particularly excited or unimpressed by a particular candidate on the interview roster could “spread the word” to other evaluators scheduled to meet with him/her later that day. I witnessed such exchanges at Holt. When informally discussing candidates on their interview rosters at breakfasts and lunches, evaluators commonly expressed their feelings of anticipation or dread about interviewing particular candidates and asked other evaluators whether they knew any of the candidates on their lists and if so, what was “their feel” about them. They used words such as “phenomenal,” “superstar,” “rock star,” “awesome,” “awkward,” “creepy,” or even “weirdo” to describe those they had encountered. Positive reports often led listeners to dog-ear or asterisk the resume in their pile. One evaluator seated next to me during such a discussion responded to a report of a “horror show” by placing a small “x” on the top right corner of the

candidate's resume. Thus, the reports of other evaluators had the potential to color an evaluator's energy expectation of a candidate before actually meeting him or her.

## **Phase 2: Energy Impression**

Equipped with rough mental sketches of candidates, evaluators developed fuller impressions during the first minutes of ice-breaking conversation upon meeting candidates in interviews. Energy expectations were not just noise in the evaluation process; similar to research on decision-making (Clare and Storbeck 2006), they created affective frames that influenced how evaluators subsequently gathered and interpreted future information about candidates in interaction.

In the majority of firms, there was no formal script for this brief, getting-to-know-you portion of the interview. Rather, evaluators identified experiences or interests listed on a candidate's resume that they shared or otherwise found intriguing. An attorney (white, female) explained her strategy for breaking the ice, which was common across evaluators and industries: "Honestly, I don't have a rhyme or reason; I just sort of pick whatever [on the resume] looks interesting to me." As such, having resume activities that the evaluator found personally exciting could not only result in a higher energy expectation for the candidate (Phase 1) but also provide more fertile ground for energy-producing discussion in initial interaction (Phase 2).

These initial interactions, although topically unpredictable, were crucial as evaluators developed an *energy impression* that pervaded the rest of the interview. A legal recruiting manager (white, female) summarized the importance of these first moments when she remarked, "Most interviewers will decide right off if they want someone or not." Such sentiments are consistent with research showing that interviewers typically make up their minds about candidates in the first five minutes of meeting them and rarely deviate from these initial impressions (Iyengar 2010). In line with prior research on emotions and expectations (Johnson et al. 2000), when initial interactions confirmed the energy expectation generated prior to meeting a candidate, they reinforced or even

amplified the evaluator's feelings of being "pumped up" or "drained" of energy. A banker (white, male) provided such an example, "I had seen on her resume that she was a diver. So am I, so I started by asking her about that and we had a great discussion about getting certified in Thailand...We just had an instant spark." He ranked her first of all candidates he had interviewed that hiring season and championed her in deliberations. Conversely, the attorney from the previous section who reported having a low energy expectation for a candidate with whom he anticipated having "nothing to talk about" described a self-fulfilling prophecy in the negative direction: "She had great grades and was clearly a bright girl, but I don't know—I simply had nothing to say to her...I couldn't pass her on because I couldn't bore other people [in the office] to death." He declined to pass her on to the second round of interviews.

However, the first moments of the interview also provided opportunities for revision of energy expectations. Candidates who seemed dull on paper could prove to be engaging or even captivating in person; conversely, candidates who were thought to be "shoo-ins" from an energy perspective could be "duds" if they did not reinforce this expectation. An attorney (white, male) recalled such a disappointment: "This one guy I interviewed listed something about high stakes dice-rolling on his resume. I was like, 'Awesome!' But he couldn't get me excited about it. Here was a really interesting tidbit that could have been really fun to talk about, but he just couldn't get me excited or wow me with it." He did not pass on the candidate for callbacks. Similarly, an attorney (white, female) expressed how she felt deflated after having high hopes for a high-achieving candidate: "He was great on paper—top of his class, great school, but after three minutes it was just like 'Blech! Get me out!' He was so boring." In some respects, such candidates suffered the worst fate from an energy perspective, because interviewers experienced an extreme clash between high expectations and unpleasant initial interaction as being disruptive to the flow of conversation. Some evaluators referred to such a dramatic drop in their excitement levels as a "bomb" or a "crash and

burn” and reported that such situations were extremely difficult to recover from, partially because they tended to “check out” of interviews that were initially unpleasant.

Thus, although energy expectations were important in setting the initial energy level of an interaction and often influenced an evaluator’s subsequent emotional responses, energy levels were generally still malleable during the impression formation stage. Candidates needed to generate or maintain enthusiasm in initial conversation and avoid negative emotional reactions in order to keep the attention and excitement of their interviewer and avoid an energy “crash.” Several factors commonly contributed to the level of energy experienced in the impression formation stage: similarity, candidate energy, vividness, inauthenticity, and physical attractiveness.

### *Similarity*

As noted in Phase 1, commonalities in extracurricular interests or backgrounds listed on resumes could create positive energy expectations that could provide a sense of conversational momentum (or, in the case of a lack of commonalities, a sense of dread or conversational inertia). Similarly, new commonalities not listed on a resume discovered during the first few minutes of conversation could also provide affective boosts. However, an expectation of excitement derived from resume similarities could also result in energy drops if, during the first few moments of conversation, these similarities were disconfirmed. An attorney (Indian-American, male) recalled the trouble he had during his own job search at top law firms, “I’d have interviews where they looked at my resume and saw I danced in college. Even some of the male partners would be really excited to talk to me. But when they found out I did street dancing and couldn’t talk about ballet with them, you could hear the thud in the room. I didn’t get a single one of those jobs.”

### *Candidate Energy*

As Collins notes, successful interaction rituals are characterized by *shared* initial emotion. As such, perceptions of candidates’ energy levels were crucial sources of evaluators’ energy impressions.

Collins argues that energy levels are “contagious”—individuals who bring high levels of energy to a situation will boost others’ energy, provided the other prerequisites for an interaction ritual are met. Conversely, those who enter an interaction without a sense of enthusiasm will likely bring down the energy of those around them. However, individuals are attracted to the highest-energy alters.

Evaluators reported that a candidate’s energy level was a crucial source of their own excitement; they reported gravitating toward high-energy candidates because they felt their own stocks of energy were depleted during the recruitment process, particularly during on-campus interviews. Many traveled long distances the night before a campus visit to arrive onsite for an 8 a.m. or 9 a.m. start, went through a full day of interviews with rare breaks (as one attorney described, “You’re lucky if you get a cup of coffee”), sat through deliberations, attended recruitment dinners and receptions afterward, often came home to a full day’s load of client work to complete in their hotel room, and then repeated this schedule for one or more additional days. Moreover, although many enjoyed having the chance to speak with candidates, they also found sitting through long hours asking similar questions to people “draining” if not “mind-blowingly dull.” Consequently, they relied on candidates to combat boredom and boost (or at least replenish) their own energy throughout the day. A consultant (Indian, male) described:

The number two thing [I look for] is energy level....I tell people when I go to our [recruitment] presentations to come in to interview as if you are excited to be there. Because there is a chance that this is my tenth interview of the day. Honestly, I am tired myself. I have been doing it, you know, all day. So the more energetic you are, the more you engage me in a conversation, the better it is.

In addition to such acute fatigue, they also described a more chronic energy drain due to the demanding and often mundane nature of their work that made them more susceptible to enthusiastic candidates. A banker (white, male) explained:

I really like it when candidates are excited. This job is really rough—it's repetitive and long hours and is often times just painful. It's nice when you go back [to campus] when you've been here a while and are jaded, like we all are, to see these bright, enthusiastic faces that would do anything to have your job. It really pumps you up.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to such energy depletion among evaluators, participants believed that demonstrating a baseline level of enthusiasm during the interview was a sign of underlying stamina, an asset in professional service organizations due to demanding work schedules. A banker (white, male) explained, “Energy level it's probably really important because...all these types of jobs, they're very strenuous in terms of hours and lack of sleep and all that.”

When asked how they judge a candidate's energy level, evaluators often struggled, explaining it as something they again felt in their gut. When probed deeper, evaluators highlighted factors such as posture, gaze, and inflection—which, according to Collins, are manifestations of the physiological dimensions of emotional energy and psychologists have demonstrated are correlated with perceptions of both likeability and competence (Palmer and Simmons 1995). However, candidate energy was a more effervescent quality not reducible to nonverbal skill alone. A consultant (white, female) summarized, “Some of it is body language, just about eye contact and, you know, leaning forward, showing interest in what the person is saying. But honestly, I am afraid there isn't a science to it...an important part of that is just energy.”

“Good energy” in initial interaction seemed to have several components. First, whereas Collins suggests that obeying traditional order-giving and order-taking relations is what produces emotional energy for those in positions of power in interactions, evaluators reported being more energized by candidates who minimized or even reversed the traditional hierarchy between

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<sup>14</sup> Such processes may help to explain why firms spend hundreds of thousands (some, millions) of dollars per year flying revenue-generating professionals around the globe to interview candidates on elite campuses rather than outsourcing this function to local HR staff. “Going back to campus” may help generate ritual attachment to the firm and periodically reinforce employee commitment to energy-draining jobs.

interviewer and interviewee. A consultant (white, male) explained, “The best ones start the interview process off by asking *you* questions.” He gave one example:

We were walking from the room where the candidates congregate....to where we were actually conducting the interviews...she was instantly asking questions about my bio that were on my bio card ....That kind of engagement initially I think really helps. And it also turns it directly into the kind of dialogue that I was talking about because it instantly kind of subverts the traditional interviewer-interviewee relationship. You sort of straight away start out with the interviewer answering questions.

As such, contrary to Collins, it was not conformity to order-giving and order-taking relations that provided evaluators with feelings of emotional energy in the job interview setting but rather *reversals* of the interviewer-interviewee hierarchy.

Second, although candidates needed to demonstrate excitement in interaction, they couldn’t come in with too much enthusiasm or they ran the risk of overwhelming their evaluators. An attorney (white, female) described one such example:

He was like super gung ho and really wanted to work for [FIRM] because [FIRM] has a great reputation for [PRACTICE AREA] and that’s what he really wanted to do, and had wanted to do for five years and was really excited and knew everything about [FIRM]...The partner I was [interviewing] didn’t like him at all. He thought he was *trying too hard*....we didn’t give him a callback....It’s like in a romantic relationship....Nobody wants the guy that is falling all over you.<sup>15</sup>

Consequently, as described one consultant (white, male) candidate energy was “a series of delicate balances” between excitement and reserve. Yet, what constituted good but not overwhelming energy varied by the energy level of the specific interviewer. Interviewers sought a degree of affective match in job candidates. For example, an extraordinarily energetic attorney (white, female), who spoke rapidly and emphatically in our conversation, said of her best candidate, “She was incredibly high energy and just funny and interesting and stood out a mile away from anyone else. She had so much energy; I thought she was a little bit crazy! But she was just so ambitious and so intense and so bright.” A more mellow attorney, also a white female, described the importance of affective

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<sup>15</sup> Such aversion was not an artifact of inauthentic self-presentation, as “overly enthusiastic” candidates could be sincere in their enthusiasm, but still perceived as “desperate” or even “creepy.”

matching: “I think if you go into an interview and the person you’re interviewing, like, is very laid back, you need to meet their level and if you come into an interview and the person you’re interviewing with is very serious...you need to meet that level as well.” Consequently, evaluators sought candidates who displayed elevated but not overwhelmingly high energy and often favored candidates whose energy levels matched their own. Thus, individuals may bare closer resemblances to energy balancers rather than maximizers, as posited by Collins.

Third, perceptions of candidate energy are embedded in both culture and social structure. As Collins notes, emotional energy tends to build and carry-over from interaction to interaction. Individuals who occupy positions of high status or privilege in society—whether based on race, sex, height, or material resources—tend to import higher levels of emotional energy with them into an interaction and elicit it from others in future interactions. Similarly, research in the sociology of emotions shows that members of lower status groups, particularly women and racial minorities, are more likely to experience and express negative emotions, resulting in increased likelihood of global negative emotional energy, negative affect, and even depression (Simon and Lively 2010). As such, it is likely that perceptions of candidate energy were linked to candidates’ status outside of the interview room.

However, as Summers-Effler (2002) notes, there is not a one-to-one correspondence between individuals’ structural position, including sex and race, and their stocks of emotional energy. Similarly, in my sample, there were few race and sex differences in perceptions of candidates’ energy.<sup>16</sup> This may be due to the fact that applicants have been pre-screened for the possession of an elite university credential and thus have alternative sources of positive emotional energy in interactions. However, one exception was for Asian (but interestingly, not Asian-American) women.

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<sup>16</sup> Likewise, at Holt, women and ethnic minorities were hired at higher rates than white or male applicants (see Online Supplement).



Consistent with racial stereotypes of passivity, these candidates were more frequently described than other candidates as “dull” or displaying energy levels that were “too low” and were often rejected on this basis.

Additionally, what constituted “good energy” was important cultural knowledge that not all applicants possessed. Norms governing what types of emotions and expressions are appropriate in a given domain are culturally-specific and tend to have an important classed dimension (Gordon 1989). In the elite professional service context, candidates had to know to be enthusiastic but not overly so in order to excite but not overwhelm their evaluators and to subvert the interviewee-interviewer hierarchy in interaction. In addition to potential racial and gender biases in these types of interaction styles, the ability to feel at ease and make others—particularly persons of authority—feel at ease in any situation is a hallmark of socio-economic elites (Khan 2010). As such, candidates who had high status outside the interview room could be perceived as bringing better energy to the table.

### *Vividness*

Storytelling was an essential part of the interview process. Whereas in the expectation formation phase, evaluators crafted an energy-boosting, neutral, or draining story about candidates in their own minds based on resumes, in the impression formation phase, candidates were charged with crafting their own narratives. Just as the vigor with which candidates described their interests and backgrounds (*candidate energy*) influenced evaluators’ levels of excitement, the vividness of their narrative content also affected energy levels. Experiences could be vivid because they were personally exciting to evaluators based on their personal interests. An attorney (white, female) described one such case:

I can’t remember where he went to law school. But what stood out for me is that he did sports broadcasting on...the major AM station in the New York area and he did all the Yankee games for them, and I thought that was so cool that, you know, he did that while going to law school...We had a lot to talk about because of that.

However, a highly vivid and dramatic personal “story” could compensate for a lack of common interests or experiences. In particular, “rags to riches” stories could provide potent energy boosts derived through deference. For example, a legal hiring manager (white, female) related:

He told me this awesome story about how he immigrated to the U.S. He was like a Vietnamese boat person and talked about the travel in the boat and the pirates that were in Vietnam...He said, “I went from not speaking English to being the valedictorian graduating summa of my undergrad class.” I mean those kinds of stories are so impressive because this is someone who kind of worked his way up.

As such, although vividness could serve as alternative means of energy production for candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds, candidates needed to know “to tell their story” and weave it into a compelling narrative of overcoming obstacles that evaluators found to be emotion-boosting; cultural knowledge that members of traditionally under-represented groups may not have without coaching from someone in the know (see Phillips, Rothbard, and Dumas 2009).

*Negative Emotional Energy: Inauthenticity*

As Summers-Effler (2004) notes, individuals not only seek to increase their stocks of positive emotions but also avoid negative emotions. Anger was a critical source of negative emotional energy development in impression formation; it was—in my participants’ words—a “deal breaker” that extinguished positive feelings experienced up to that point and often led interviewers to “check out” of an interview. Although there were few overall differences between the emotional reports of male and female evaluators, consistent with gendered prescriptions of emotion (Simon and Lively 2010), men were significantly more likely to report experiencing anger toward candidates. Anger most commonly arose when evaluators believed candidates were inauthentic in their self-presentation,<sup>17</sup> particularly in exaggerating information on their resume.<sup>18</sup> A lawyer (white, male) describes one such situation:

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<sup>17</sup> Feelings of authenticity in self-presentation, however, were not common sources of energy boosts.

<sup>18</sup> Thus, although candidates could try to “pad” their resumes with activities they believed evaluators would find to be exciting, such a strategy was risky.

He had on his resume a lot of hobbies listed because he felt it would make him seem more well-rounded. One of his hobbies was classical literature. I was curious because that was the first time I had *ever* seen that on a resume. I asked him if he did a lot of reading, and he said yes. I said, “What exactly is classical literature?” And he said, “Well, for me I just really like 20<sup>th</sup> century literature.” I asked him, “Who do you like?” And he said, “Don DeLillo.” I said, “Oh really? What have you read?” And he couldn’t name anything...When I filled out his eval, I wrote, “Seems like a shameless self-promoter.”

A banker (white, male) recalled another situation, which led him to “tune out” of the rest of the interview and reject the candidate:

I know things about the triathlon and marathon world, and I caught...one person that said, “Ran Boston Marathon blah, blah, blah.” Well, you have to qualify for Boston, so those would be immediate questions. “So what marathon did you qualify for Boston in?”...He had gotten in through charity slot and had run a leg of it, and claimed to have run the Boston Marathon. It was like, no. They’re out.

Thus, anger is a powerful source of negative emotional energy that can extinguish stocks of positive emotions accumulated in an interaction.

### *Physical Attractiveness*

Beauty is a potent status characteristic that influences interpersonal attraction and evaluation (Webster 2003), including in hiring (Hamermesh 2011). Although the effect of physical attractiveness is difficult to analyze through self-report due to social desirability concerns, several evaluators—disproportionately male investment bankers—explicitly mentioned this quality as producing energy “sparks.” A banker (Indian, male) candidly admitted, “I don’t know if I’m too easy especially on pretty girls. Because it’s fun to talk to them; of course, you’d want to have them around!” Another banker (white, male) described a candidate who had recently excited him: “I mean we don’t usually get blond girls. If we get a girl, we usually get Asians. I know it’s a stereotype, but it’s true.”

I also witnessed examples of the energizing effect of physical attractiveness while at Holt. In debriefing evaluators after interviews, I occasionally heard comments about a candidate’s physical appearance. For example, one consultant (Asian, female) started her description of a candidate’s

performance by sighing and saying with a smile, “He just had the most amazing blue eyes.” Another downloaded a photo of a candidate she found particularly attractive and informed passers-by of his “hotness” and instructed interviewers to “be nice to my future husband!” The latter example illustrates how physical attraction not only could contribute to evaluators’ energy impressions in interviews but also influence other evaluators’ future energy expectations through word-of-mouth. Although such anecdotes are descriptive at best, such energy-boosting “sparks” of physical attraction could help explain why at Holt, as described extensively in another article, candidates paired with a cross-sex rather than same-sex evaluator tended to receive better interview evaluations.

### **Phase 3: Performance Evaluation**

Whereas energy expectations were easily revised, energy impressions were not and they were reported to frequently result in self-fulfilling prophecies of engagement or boredom. People have short attention spans. They typically develop an impression of a person within minutes or even seconds of encountering them, and these initial impressions are very resistant to change (Ambady and Weisbuch 2010). This is particularly true in the case of hiring, where interviewers tend to decide whether they will recommend a candidate within the first five minutes of meeting them and subsequently cherry-pick information to confirm their initial impressions (Iyengar 2010). Similarly, my evaluators described how interviewers tended to “check out” from an interview or “fall in love” with a candidate based on the first few minutes of conversation. A consultant (white, female) related:

People form an opinion of that person very early on in the interview and that ends up informing their perspective on everything that that candidate says, and they just ask questions to validate that their opinion of that person is right rather than using questions to really sort of probe and test whether this person is, you know, what their strengths and weaknesses are.

Furthermore, a high energy impression could result in a “halo” effect that cast a positive light on evaluations of job-relevant skills. Psychologists have shown that individuals experiencing positive feelings such as excitement overweigh other people’s strengths in evaluation and discount their

weaknesses. Conversely, those experiencing negative feelings such as boredom or anger exaggerate others' weaknesses and discount their strengths. Moreover, people use their feelings as measures of quality, assuming that people who make them feel good *are* good (for a review, see Clore and Storbeck 2006). A consulting partner (Indian, male) observed similar trends over his years running recruitment for his office:

Interviewers tend to fall in love with candidates. If they really like them from the first few moments of conversation, they'll be rooting for them throughout the rest of the interview. They'll end up overrating them on all the dimensions. And if they don't fall in love, they overweigh the candidate's weak spots.

However, it was during the formal performance evaluation phase—when evaluators specifically tested job-relevant knowledge and skills—that technical competence was most likely to produce an energy boost. The degree to which this phase was emotionally arousing for evaluators varied by the extent to which interview formats incorporated direct measures of job-relevant knowledge or skills, such as tests of technical abilities or questions about prior teamwork. Consultants, who administer lengthy business-case questions, were most likely to express excitement (or any other emotion) during this phase, followed by bankers, then lawyers. Technical tests such as case questions provided additional stimuli through which to become positively or negatively emotionally aroused other than first impressions based off of extracurricular activities and personal narratives. As such, interview format affects the degree to which feelings of emotional energy develop on the basis of perceived job-relevant knowledge and skills versus candidates' biographies and personal qualities in job interviews.

Even though performance on technical tests could produce emotional boosts in interviews, particularly in consulting, because interviews were structured so that technical tests occurred in the middle of the interview after energy impressions had already developed, performance in this phase frequently served to maintain previously established energy levels. However, performance on technical tests could have dramatic energy effects at the margins of performance quality. Extremely

poor performance on technical tests could extinguish positive energy accumulated to that point, even for the most exciting candidates, disqualifying them from further consideration. A managing director (white, male) at Holt gave one such example in a debrief I observed, “He [white, male] has one of the best resumes I’ve ever seen. He worked at Parthenon, Pfizer, went to Stanford and had a 3.9....But his case performance was *bad*,” he said, elongating the vowel. “He had a really hard time with the math. I was *flabbergasted*. I thought he would be a ten but he was like a zero.” He argued strongly for rejecting the candidate who was then “dinged.” Conversely, stellar performance on technical measures could produce a significant energy boost that could propel a previously average candidate to future rounds. Such instances occurred almost exclusively in consulting. A consultant (Asian, female) described a candidate who was “pretty unremarkable” interpersonally but “case wise, he cracked it. It was clear; this person was a phenomenal businessperson...I was just blown away by him.” She later championed him in deliberations. Two factors seemed to provide such energy boosts at this stage of candidate evaluation: originality and candidate energy.

### *Originality*

Creativity in answers to job-relevant questions was one of the most potent sources of energy boosts in performance evaluation. For example, a consultant (white, female) described how she felt when a candidate went beyond competence in his answer to the case portion of the interview: “He did a really nice job of working through the problem and seeing interesting patterns and drawing interesting conclusions...you want someone who can somehow *surprise* you a bit and so seeing someone who thinks of things in a way that is new is really exciting.” However, candidates were typically not penalized for a lack of originality unless their answers were perceived to be disingenuous or in the case of consulting case interviews “too framework-y” or “lifted” from consulting interview prep books such as *Case in Point*, which coach candidates in how to respond to case interview questions.

### *Candidate Energy*

In addition, the enthusiasm with which a candidate tackled a problem was important for an evaluator's level of excitement. A consulting partner (white, female) explained:

I think you can tell whether someone is thinking on the spot and enjoying problem solving or just going through a series of sort of rehearsed steps and trying to get to the obvious answers as opposed to really truly engaging in the problem. Like, there is just something in terms of spark and creativity that comes out and stuff like that...I just feel like you can *see* it.

Although energy boosts that occurred during the performance evaluation phase were perhaps the most directly job-relevant, it is important to note that even in consulting—where such boosts were most likely to occur—energy felt during other portions of the interview had evaluative primacy. Even with a stellar resume and strong case interview performance, a lack of excitement about a candidate was a valid criterion for rejection. Conversely, high energy apart from technical performance could carry a candidate to offer. A consultant (white, male) described:

If you are kind of C+ or B- on the case but you know people are excited about you, they are energized since the time they spoke with you, they could see you working out, then you know, we will go ahead and go forward. We have plenty of stories of the person who just aced it [the case] but you're just not quite sure how you *feel* about them.

### **Phase 4: Recall and Ranking**

After having interviewed nearly a dozen candidates, each interviewer had to rank them according to his/her personal preferences. Interviewers typically took notes during their interactions with candidates but, because interviews were often scheduled back-to-back, they usually did not have time to fully complete written evaluations in real-time but rather completed them at the end of the day. As such, they relied on their sense of recall of a candidate's abilities. I argue that much of what recruiters evaluated in this stage was the candidate's *energy trace*, or the feelings of excitement that lingered in the hours after the interaction occurred.

Cognitive psychology provides an important base for understanding the dynamics of recall. Research on social cognition demonstrates that human recall is subject to several systematic biases

(for a review, see Kahneman et al. 2011). *Primacy* and *recency* effects suggest that evaluators would be more likely to remember the first and last candidate of the day, regardless of the emotional responses evoked by these particular individuals. The *availability heuristic* suggests that net of these positional effects, individuals are more likely to remember people and objects they can easily imagine. Two factors facilitate such a process. First, individuals are more likely to remember people and events that excite their senses and are emotionally arousing. In the case of job interviews, this translates into candidates that elicited particularly strong positive or negative emotional reactions from their evaluators. My data support this notion. When I asked evaluators to recall candidates from their most recent interviewing experience, they typically described stellar and abhorrent candidates with surprising ease. However, they often struggled to describe a candidate who was “borderline.” As one participant expressed, “The reason that someone is borderline is that they’re just average. They’re not memorable.” As such, because evaluators relied on recall to rank candidates, candidates who had the most positive *energy traces* at the end of the interview tended to fare better in evaluation.

Second, vividness and distinctiveness could aid in recall. A lawyer (Asian, female) explained, “Just being good enough isn’t going to make you memorable in somebody’s mind; you want to be remembered *for something*.” A banker (white, female) gave an example: “The ones that stuck out were the ones that had interesting little quirks—and obviously we’re not hiring them because they’ve seen all the movies on the ASI 100. But having something *interesting* helps.” Thus, positive emotional energy generated during interaction not only provided a sense of conversational momentum and a “halo” under which formal evaluative criteria were assessed but also aided in recall and how interviewers ranked candidates on written evaluations.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Energy traces likely affected subsequent energy expectations and impressions of future candidates, through a feedback loop driven by contrast effects.



### Phase 5: Deliberation and Decision

The culmination of emotional energy development was the deliberation phase, in which evaluators came together to make decisions about whether to advance candidates to the next round of interviews, to give them offers, or to “let them go.” It was during deliberations where subjective feelings of emotional energy experienced by evaluators were most crucial for decision-making. Similar to Lamont’s findings of decisions made by academic funding panels (Lamont 2009), I observed during deliberations at Holt how consensus quickly formed around the very best (“rock stars”) and the very worst candidates (“rejects”). However, rock stars were rare and the vast majority of candidates fell somewhere in between. All other candidates needed a champion, someone willing to advocate passionately on their behalf. When articulating this role to me, evaluators commonly used the language of love. They discussed how a candidate had to get at least one of their interviewers “passionate,” “riled up,” “fired up,” or “fall in love” with them in order to be in the running to receive an offer. As noted in Figure 4, reports of love peaked during this phase. Without such strong, positive emotions, an offer was unlikely. As a consulting partner (white, female) summarized, “Three different people interview any given candidate in the final round, and it’s reconciling those points of view. It’s understanding when people really have, like, a *passion* for a candidate versus, like, ‘Yeah, I think probably they will do just fine.’”

In *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004), Collins argues that emotional energy affects social structure largely through its motivational properties; the experience of being pumped up with emotional energy compels individuals to action, while experiences of energy loss or drain have the opposite effect. Similarly, candidates’ energy traces influenced the willingness of evaluators to mobilize on their behalf during deliberations. Unless truly passionate about a candidate, evaluators were unlikely to serve as champions because they didn’t want to “waste time and capital.” A consultant (Asian, female) explained, “Particularly if it’s late at night and I want to go home or if I have to go back and

do more client work, unless I really feel strongly about someone, I'll give in to others' opinions."

More junior interviewers were also hesitant to champion someone unless they were really passionate because as one banker (Indian, male) noted, "My reputation is on the line." Without an advocate, candidates were likely to become rejects. An HR manager for a law firm (white, male) recalled one such candidate:

He didn't wow his interviewers. They thought he'd be competent... "Definitely can do the work we do here, definitely had prepared himself, showed an interest in the firm, knew like about the firm and the type of work we do." But, it wasn't someone that people were just like "*We have to have him.*"

A consultant (Asian, male) gave another example:

One in particular is an MIT candidate, really nice guy, actually very, very solid on his interviews and he was really proficient in the cases. But this is an example, this is a great example of someone who's just sort of solid in everything, but since they are a little bit flat on the just sort of, like, passion... there was no compelling reason to fight for him. So there was no reason necessarily to ding him, but when it came down to it, no office wanted to fight for him and when that happens in the case of limited spots, you know, the perfect, most competent person just doesn't get through.

As I witnessed at Holt, the emotional culture (Gordon 1989) of these firms is such that an effective argument for or against a candidate was based on evaluators' feelings rather than their academic or professional qualifications. Tellingly, deliberations commonly began by a senior partner reading the candidate's name aloud, turning to one of his/her interviewers and asking, "What was your *feel*?" On occasion, an evaluator argued for a candidate based on credentials or, in consulting, case performance alone. But more commonly, other evaluators in the room wanted to know how excited an interviewer was about the candidate. Were they "smitten" or "blah"? Were they "blown away" or "on the fence"? In addition, a sufficiently negative gut feeling from one evaluator was a sufficient basis for rejection, even for candidates who had impressive credentials and who performed well on technical questions. For example, two managers at Holt, both white men who had graduated from professional school the same year and were friends outside the office, had

different impressions of candidate Abe, also a white, male in first-round interviews. During deliberations, they argued:

Manager 1: He was one of the best [case] performances of the day. His initial structure wasn't so great but he realized what he needed to do and just nailed it.

Manager 2: [*lifting eyebrow*] But he was so bland!

Manager 1: But he was the best case of the day.

Manager 2: Don't get me wrong, he's a nice guy and has done interesting things. There's nothing particularly wrong with him... [He shrugged] I just wasn't feeling it.

On the basis of this lack of excitement, Abe was dinged and not passed on to second-round interviews.

Although arguments for or against candidates based on “gut” typically went unchallenged, two additional factors affected candidates' fates in deliberations. The first was the status of the champion in the firm. One banker confessed, “If it's a senior partner, you shut your mouth.” The second was being able to present a vivid and emotionally arousing narrative to the group. In this respect, candidates who conveyed vivid experiences or personal narratives to their interviewers in the impression formation phase benefitted not only from more positive energy impressions but also from giving evaluators more emotional “meat” on which to craft compelling cases in deliberations. As in the case of the candidate below, such processes could counteract otherwise homophilous pressures within firms. A law firm partner (white, female) recalled:

He wasn't a great interview, I mean he wasn't very poised...but he had grown up—he was white—but he'd grown up in, like, kind of South Central, like, Compton kind of thing and there were, like, all these shootings at the school and he had a single mom and he was the first person in his family ever to go to college. And then after college he went back into South Central and taught high school for a couple of years to kind of give back to the community. And, like, he had a really good story, but he wasn't super. I mean this was probably his first time interviewing for, like, a *real* job—a job like this. And, you know, he probably has no one in his family to go to to talk to about it. So, he had a very compelling story. We ended up making him an offer to come back because of *his story*, not because his grades were off the chart, not because he interviewed so well.

## Summary

Evaluators used their emotional responses to candidates as signals of merit and bases of candidate evaluation in job interviews. Evaluators used their gut feelings, most commonly excitement followed by deference, to make “fine distinctions” between candidates and make hiring decisions. In order to receive an offer from a firm, a candidate needed to generate a positive emotional buzz in at least one but often more than one of his/her evaluators. This emotional buzz tended to develop through several phases. Evaluators developed *energy expectations* of how emotionally rewarding they believed interacting with particular candidates would be. These expectations were revised into an *energy impression* in initial interaction that colored formal performance evaluation and influenced both the fondness with which evaluators recalled and ranked candidates (*energy trace*) and whether they were motivated to act on their behalf in deliberations (*energy pulse*). Although many factors could affect employers’ emotional responses to candidates, ones that most commonly produced energy boosts were the similarity, status, and vividness of candidates’ experiences as well as candidates’ perceived energy levels in interaction.

## Alternative Accounts

It is important to consider whether the attraction produced by emotion is simply a mask for homophily between evaluators and candidates on the basis of sex or race. Several reasons suggest that this is not the case. Prior research demonstrates that controlling for the chance of being included in candidate pools, sex and/or race matches between job candidates and evaluators do not consistently drive hiring evaluations at the micro-level; effects range from positive to negative to nil for each type of match (Huffcutt 2011). In the firms studied here, the majority of interview dyads consisted of whites evaluating other whites and males evaluating other males, yet evaluators’ emotional responses to candidates were still highly salient bases of evaluation even *within* same-sex and same-race dyads. Similarly, while the majority of evaluators at Holt were white and/or male,

women and ethnic minorities were hired at higher rates than white or male applicants (see Online Supplement). This is not to say that sex or racial biases or homophily do not occur in candidate evaluation or in these firms, but rather that emotional processes also matter.

One must also consider whether employers use emotion because applicant pools are so pre-screened that they have nothing left to differentiate candidates. Although they are a select group, graduating classes at elite universities—like other universities—display internal heterogeneity.<sup>20</sup> Given that the majority of students at top-tier undergraduate and professional schools typically apply to these firms, employers had bases other than gut on which to differentiate candidates. They could have screened more intensively on relevant coursework, work experience, writing skills, standardized test performance, or even diversity—as candidates did vary along these lines—but they did not. Instead, evaluators prioritized their own emotional reactions to candidates because they believed that their emotions were both valid means of evaluating merit and valuable qualities in their own right. Thus, although more subjective factors tend to be more salient in evaluation when gross differences in quality are minimized (Lamont 2009), such as when employers narrow a long-list of candidates to a short-list or make final hiring decisions, their use is not an artifact of having no alternative screening mechanisms. Moreover, understanding how employers make fine distinctions between candidates who pass a basic threshold of qualifications is crucial for knowing who is and is not ultimately hired into an organization and who receives the material and symbolic resources employment within it offers.

Similarly, the use of emotion as a decision-making tool in hiring is *not* purely an elite or corporate phenomenon. In addition to laboratory evidence, some of the qualitative studies suggesting that employers' gut perceptions of "chemistry" matter in hiring come from nonelite, nonprofessional labor markets and range from hiring restaurant servers to fashion models (see Bills

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<sup>20</sup> Additionally, cognitive ability is only one avenue for admission to elite universities (Shulman and Bowen 2001).

1988; Brown 2001; Mears 2011). Rather, employers' emotions likely play an important role in hiring when employers have (1) multiple applicants who pass a basic threshold of competence and (2) discretion about whom they hire. Future research should examine how the relative weight of employers' emotional reactions versus other criteria and mechanisms of evaluation in hiring vary between jobs of different technical, social, and cultural requirements as well as selectivity.

Finally, although employers' emotional responses to candidates are important signals they use to judge merit, these emotional reactions are not reducible to candidates' academic or professional qualifications. As noted earlier, prior research has shown that evaluators' emotional reactions to applicants play a significant role in their hiring decisions, controlling for candidates' qualifications. Similarly, at Holt, traditional resume characteristics predicted neither interview evaluators nor final hiring decisions.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The intention of this article was not to develop an alternative model of hiring but rather one that focuses in-depth on how employers' emotions affect hiring evaluations. As such, it is far from perfect. First, the analysis focuses only on the impressions of evaluators. Just as candidates' energy levels influenced evaluators' levels of excitement, evaluators' energy likely affects candidates' excitement levels, encouraging candidates to "fall in love" or "check out" of interviews. Future research should probe the factors that contribute to emotional waxes and wanes on the candidate side, an endeavor that was not possible here due to data limitations.

Second, the article focuses only on the *interpretive* dimension of emotional energy and relies largely on retrospective, self-report. Consequently, evaluators' reports to me in research interviews may be subject to the very same biases in information processing as their evaluations of candidates in ranking and recall (Phase 4). However, because evaluators usually do not complete written interview reports in real time but rather do so at the end of a day and rely on subjective,

retrospective recall of an interaction to complete these forms and craft narratives for or against candidates in deliberations, these types of biases are integral parts of how evaluators actually compare and select candidates in real-life. Similarly, psychologists have argued that how we *remember* feeling during an interaction is most important for orienting action (Schwartz 2004). Thus, although not without limitations, studying these impressions has a substantial degree of external validity for understanding how employers' emotional reactions to job candidates affect their hiring evaluations.

Third, although subjective interpretations of emotional experiences are critical for orienting action (Turner and Stets 2006), it is possible that levels of emotional and physiological arousal beyond the awareness of evaluators played a significant role in candidate evaluation. Future research could examine the relationship between physiological arousal and cognitive appraisals. Although using biologically based techniques to do so might be too intrusive in real-life interviews, laboratory settings represent exciting venues through which to examine physiological drivers and correlates of emotional boosts.

Fourth, although the proposed theoretical model of how emotional energy develops may be generalizable to other labor markets and/or used to inform future cases of emotion in interpersonal evaluation, several scope conditions are necessary. The model describes emotional energy developing through several phases, but it is possible that an evaluation could deviate from this progression. Similarly, because of how these firms typically structure evaluation (i.e., warm up through ice-breaking chit-chat, followed by skills assessment, then group deliberation), it is possible that in evaluations with no conversational component or no deliberation, emotional energy dynamics could differ in progress or content. Moreover, it is possible that an interaction could skip phases due to time constraints, evaluator deviation from typical scripts, or external disruptions. As such, research should investigate how the energy dynamics outlined here vary between different types of interaction formats and media—for example, how emotional energy development occurs in

the absence of face-to-face evaluations, such as in virtual or online communities. Finally, net of the process of emotional energy development, the specific qualities that evaluators find to be energy-boosting may differ between occupations. For example, investment bankers, sociologists, and computer scientists may find different types of activities and experiences to be emotionally arousing.

## CONCLUSION

Successfully entering an elite professional service firm—and receiving the high material and symbolic rewards entailed by employment in one—requires not only a baseline of human capital, as measured by academic achievement, work experience, and social skill, but also the ability to energize others in job interviews. Evaluators privileged candidates who pumped them up with positive feelings of excitement and deference due to the widespread belief that emotional responses were valid and reliable signals of merit; the luxury of having multiple candidates who were perceived to be “above the bar”; an interview cadre that commonly was drained, exhausted, and in need of an energy boost to maintain their attention and mood; and the widely held cultural belief that good candidates make you *feel* good. Consequently, my findings suggest that the ability to elicit strong, positive, emotional responses from others is a form of *emotional capital* that has economic conversion value (Bourdieu 1986) in labor markets. The fate of similarly educated students in the competition for elite jobs was linked to their ability to generate feelings of excitement and enthusiasm in their interviewers. Applicants who successfully did so could cash in these emotional responses for jobs offering salaries two to four times higher than their classmates and for admission to a prestigious occupational group that serves as a gateway to the contemporary American economic elite.

### *Implications for Hiring Research*

My findings demonstrate the importance of considering employers’ emotional reactions to job candidates in hiring. When articulating the criteria they use to evaluate candidate in job interviews, less than a quarter of evaluators listed competence, intelligence, or any technical skill as



the most important quality. Instead, evaluators prioritized more ephemeral and nebulous constructs such as feelings of chemistry, excitement, and even love for candidates. Such findings suggest that, far from just error, noise, or discrimination, the residual terms of conventional sociological models of hiring also contain active emotional work on the part of employers; employers seek new employees not only whom they believe will be able to satisfactorily execute technical and social job requirements but also who make them personally feel good in interaction. It is important to emphasize that my argument is *not* that traditional resume metrics, technical skills, or cognitive skills do not matter in hiring—indeed in this and other contexts they do. Rather, in order to fully understand how employers make hiring decisions, it is necessary to understand emotional factors *in addition* to paper-driven estimates of productive capabilities and cognitive skills. Future research should examine the role that emotional dynamics play in other critical moments of stratification in organizations, such as promotion and termination decisions.

#### *Implications for Organizational Performance*

The use of emotion in hiring is neither inherently negative nor positive; its consequences likely depend on the job in question, to what extent employers privilege emotion versus other criteria in evaluation, and what qualities tend to produce emotional arousal. Due to limitations in the data, I cannot analyze whether using emotion as an evaluative tool increases or decreases the future job performance of new hires. However, “going with your gut” versus more systematic and standardized tests of directly job-relevant skills likely poses both advantages and disadvantages for elite professional service firms. On the positive side, emotion provides a simple, fast heuristic to distinguish between multiple candidates who meet a basic threshold of paper qualifications. In this manner, it could provide greater efficiency by minimizing time spent on candidate evaluation, which is important because revenue-generating professionals charged with full-time client work perform these evaluations. In addition, given the long hours employees spend together on the job and the

client-facing demands of the work, selecting new coworkers who provide others with surges of positive emotions could increase employee satisfaction, worker morale, and client satisfaction, possibly contributing employee or client retention.

However, relying so heavily on gut reactions may also pose important downsides for firms. Although emotions can be smart (Damasio 1994), they tend to be so with practice—when an individual has extensive experience making a particular type of decision and has received information on the effectiveness of his/her choices (Iyengar 2010). Yet, in these firms, evaluators receive minimal (if any) training in candidate evaluation, use their personal theories of what constitutes merit and how best to judge it, and receive virtually no feedback on the products of their guts in terms of decision-making quality. As such, future research should use longitudinal data to investigate under what conditions going with your gut produces better or worse hires. However, organizations that seek to harness emotional processes in a manner more closely tied to directly job-relevant qualities could include more standardized tests of job-relevant skills—such as the types of case interviews implemented in consulting or simulations of client interactions—to provide opportunities for sparks to develop based on more systematic measures of analytical and social skills. Moreover, they should present candidates with such tests at the *beginning* of interviews so that evaluators' initial energy impressions are anchored in performance on these tests.

#### *Implications for Stratification Processes*

Relying so heavily on emotions simultaneously reinforces and challenges existing socio-demographic inequalities in the competition for elite jobs. The positive energy expectations and impressions produced by similarity posed advantages for applicants whose backgrounds, extracurricular profiles, and styles of self-presentation were similar to their overwhelmingly white, male, Ivy League-educated interviewers, potentially reinforcing sex, race, and class inequalities in firms. In addition, the positive energy expectations produced by involvement in high-status

activities, particularly flawless educational pedigrees and participation in varsity athletics at elite universities, has a substantial classed dimension, as both are associated with higher parental socioeconomic status (Shulman and Bowen 2001).

More generally, the importance of extracurricular activities as sources of excitement versus other types of accomplishments—whether driven by similarity, status, or vividness—has the potential to disadvantage candidates from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. To be perceived as someone who would be or was exciting to interact with, students needed to have not only the time and resources to extensively pursue energy-boosting extracurricular activities—which, if one must work to cover living expenses, contribute to tuition, or support family members, may be unlikely—but also the cultural knowledge to cultivate exciting leisure portfolios beginning in childhood and maintain them throughout higher education. Such knowledge is a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) that has an important classed dimension. Upper-middle class parents are more likely to enroll their children in extracurricular pursuits (Lareau 2003). Moreover, in contrast to students from upper-middle class backgrounds, less affluent students are more likely to enter campus believing that achievements in the classroom rather than on the field or in the concert hall matter most for future success and tend to invest more in academics than in extracurriculars (Bergerson 2007).

Yet, just as emotional energy dynamics can not only reinforce but also challenge existing social arrangements (Summers-Effler 2002), the feelings of deference derived through vivid personal stories could serve as an alternative means of energy production for candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds, provided they were able to weave their experiences into compelling personal narratives about overcoming obstacles. However, such candidates had to not only have the building blocks for such stories, which not all traditionally under-represented candidates do, but also (1) *know* that telling deeply personal stories was not only appropriate but also advantageous in job interviews, (2) be comfortable disclosing sensitive information to strangers, and (3) do so successfully with each

interviewer, which members of lower status groups may be reluctant to do without coaching from someone in the know (Phillips et al. 2009).

### *Implications for Interaction Ritual Theory*

My empirical findings support Collins' hypothesis that emotion is an important basis of interpersonal evaluation and selection in job interviews. However, in addition to adding important temporal and processual dimensions to Collins' work through the proposed model of emotional energy development, my analysis also suggests five points of refinement to his theories. First, the development of emotional energy seems to begin *prior* to face-to-face interaction through the construction of an *energy expectation*. Second, shared initial emotion is not a sufficient ingredient for a successful interaction. Rather, as demonstrated in the case of "crash and burns," feelings of excitement and enthusiasm need to be maintained or reinforced, not only between encounters as Collins suggests, but at key moments within a single encounter to successfully compel evaluators to action. Third, although reports of excitement were the most common sources of positive emotional energy, my findings call attention to other emotions that affect emotional energy flows within an interaction, such as deference (Hallett 2007), anger, and love. Fourth, my finding that evaluators gravitated toward candidates who demonstrated high but not overwhelming energy as well as some degree of affective match with their own energy levels calls into question Collins' claim that individuals are energy maximizers—a proposition that has come under attack from critics for its rational choice underpinnings (Fine 2005; Münch, 2005). Rather, my findings suggest that individuals do actively seek to increase their own stocks of emotional energy in interaction, but they do so within limits and may bear a closer resemblance to energy balancers than maximizers.

Finally, job interviews may be one example of a specific type of interaction ritual not specified by Collins. In addition to the four criteria he lists as prerequisites for successful interaction rituals, Collins specifies additional ingredients for successful interactions directly linked to

stratification processes. In so-called *power rituals*—interactions between parties of unequal resources—he argues that obedience to hierarchical order-giving and order-taking relations yields the highest amounts of emotional energy for those in positions of authority. Conversely, in *status rituals*—interactions that affirm or deny group membership boundaries—feelings of belonging are most crucial. Although Collins argues that most interactions have an element of each, job interviews represent an interesting hybrid—they are interactions between individuals of vastly unequal situational power that are used to judge suitability for future membership in a status group (i.e., a firm or occupation). In job interviews, the feelings of similarity, commonality, and attachment that exemplify effective status rituals are necessary for a successful outcome, but it is a feeling of situational deference and status reversal (i.e., that the candidate “impresses,” “wows,” or is otherwise a “rock star”) rather than dominance that energizes those in power. These sorts of *gatekeeping rituals* represent an important micro-social foundation of macro-level inequalities, and their dynamics warrant further theoretical and empirical attention.

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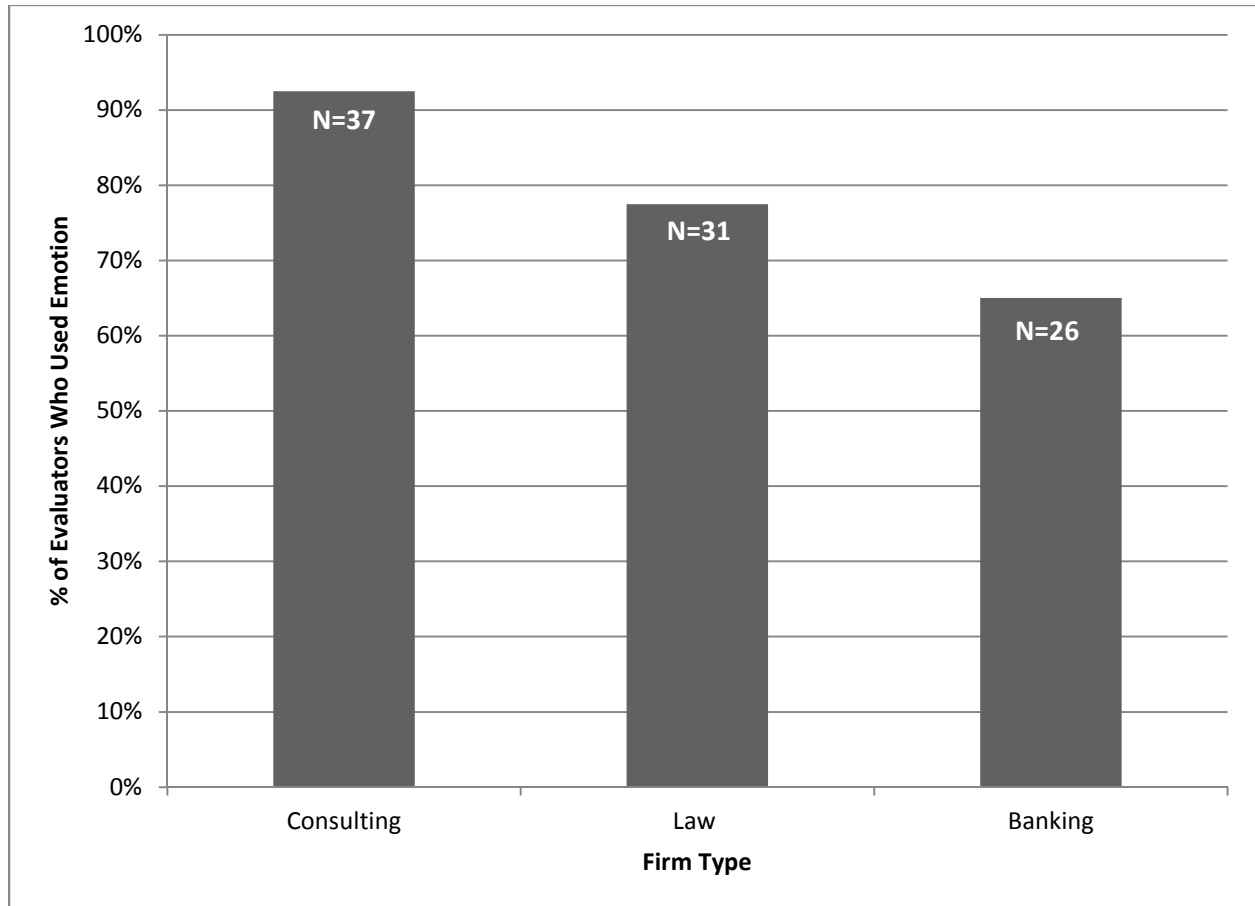
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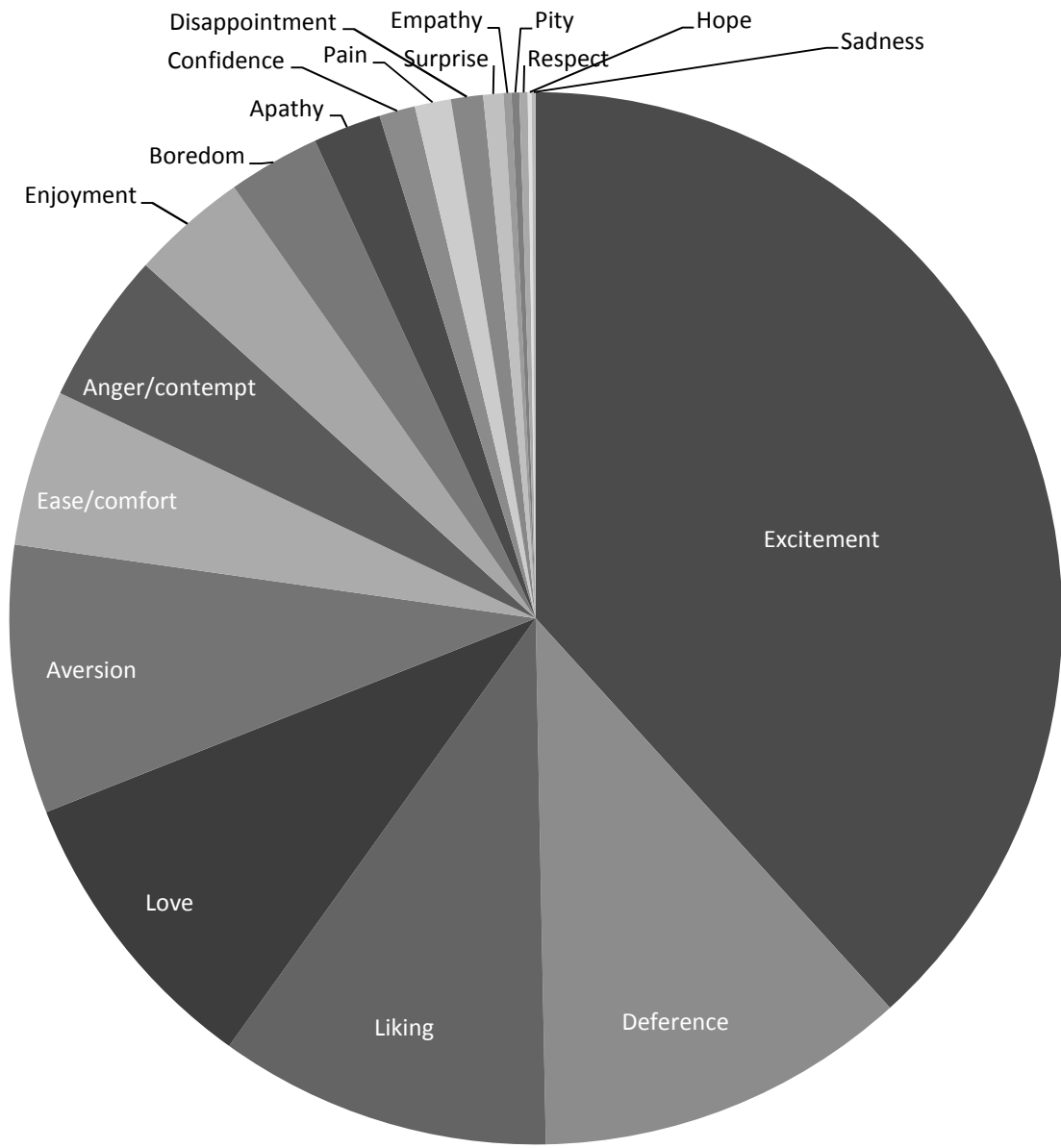
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Figure 1. Percentage of Participants Who Used Emotion When Evaluating Job Candidates



Note: This figure represents the proportion of participants who—in research interviews—used any emotion spontaneously when evaluating the merit of job candidates recently interviewed, ideal candidates, and mock candidate profiles.

Figure 2. Relative Prevalence of Specific Emotions in Evaluation



Note: This figure represents the relative prevalence of specific emotions out of all emotions reported when research interview participants evaluated the merit of job candidates recently interviewed, ideal candidates, and mock candidate profiles.

Figure 3: Theoretical Model of Emotional Energy Development in Job Interviews

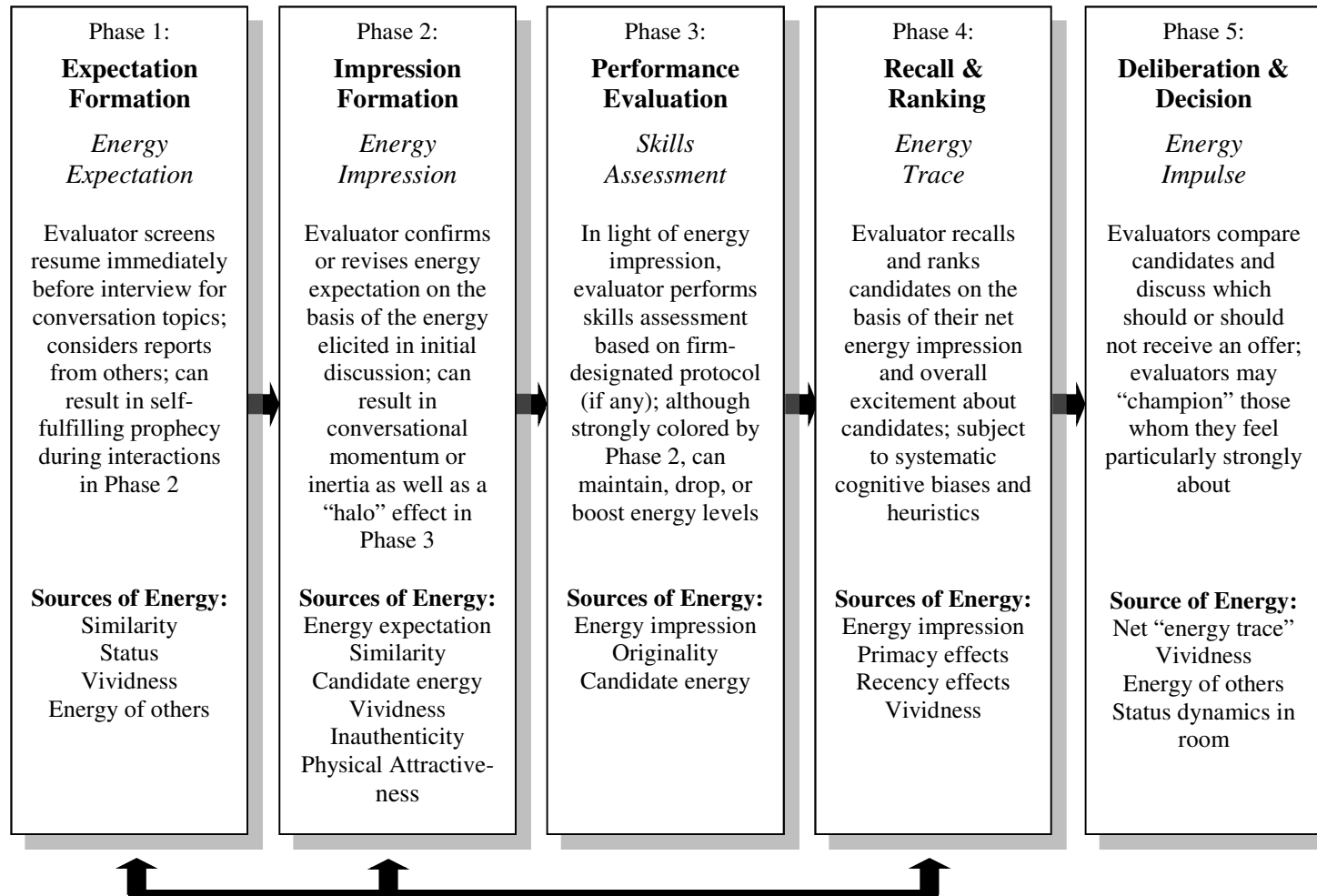
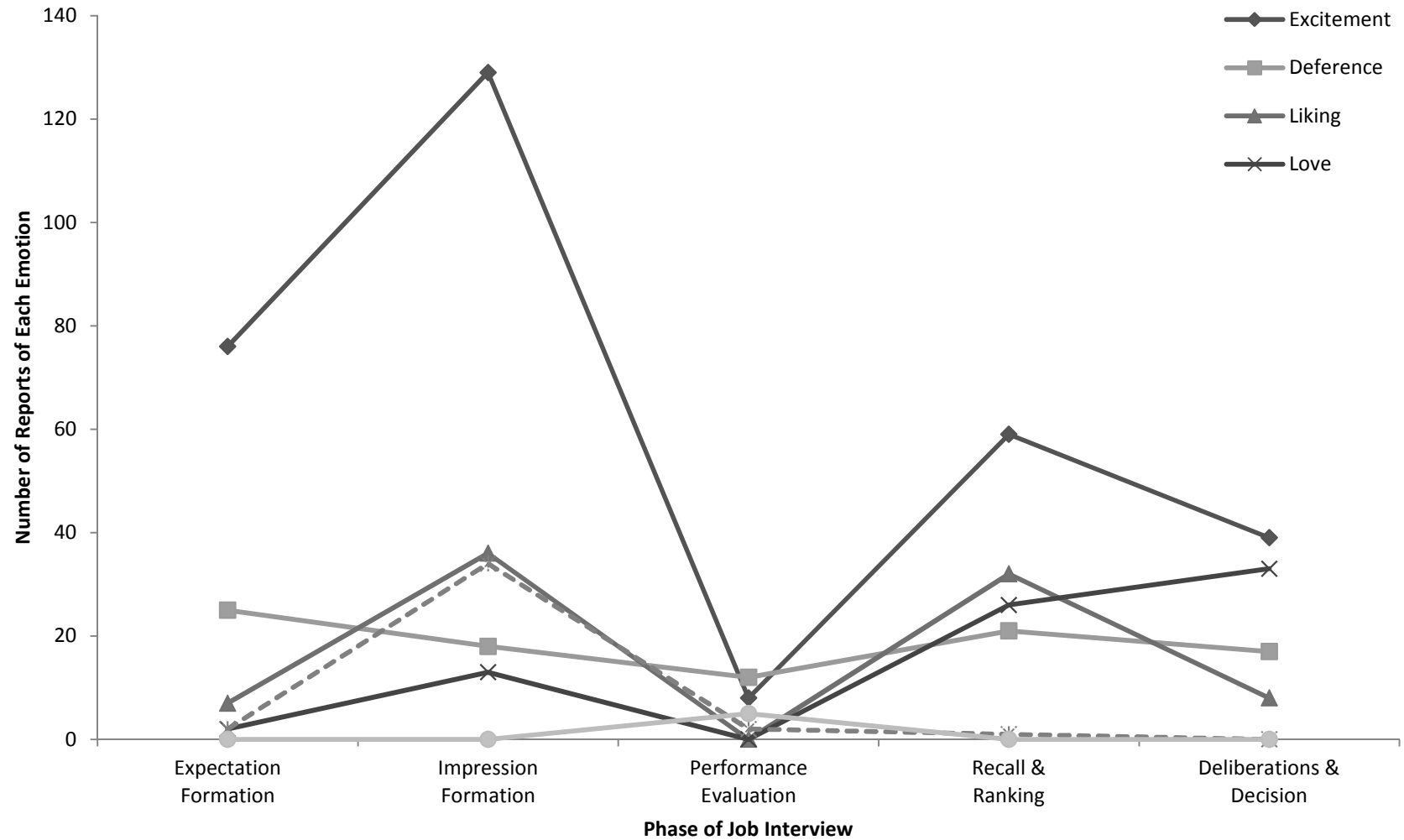
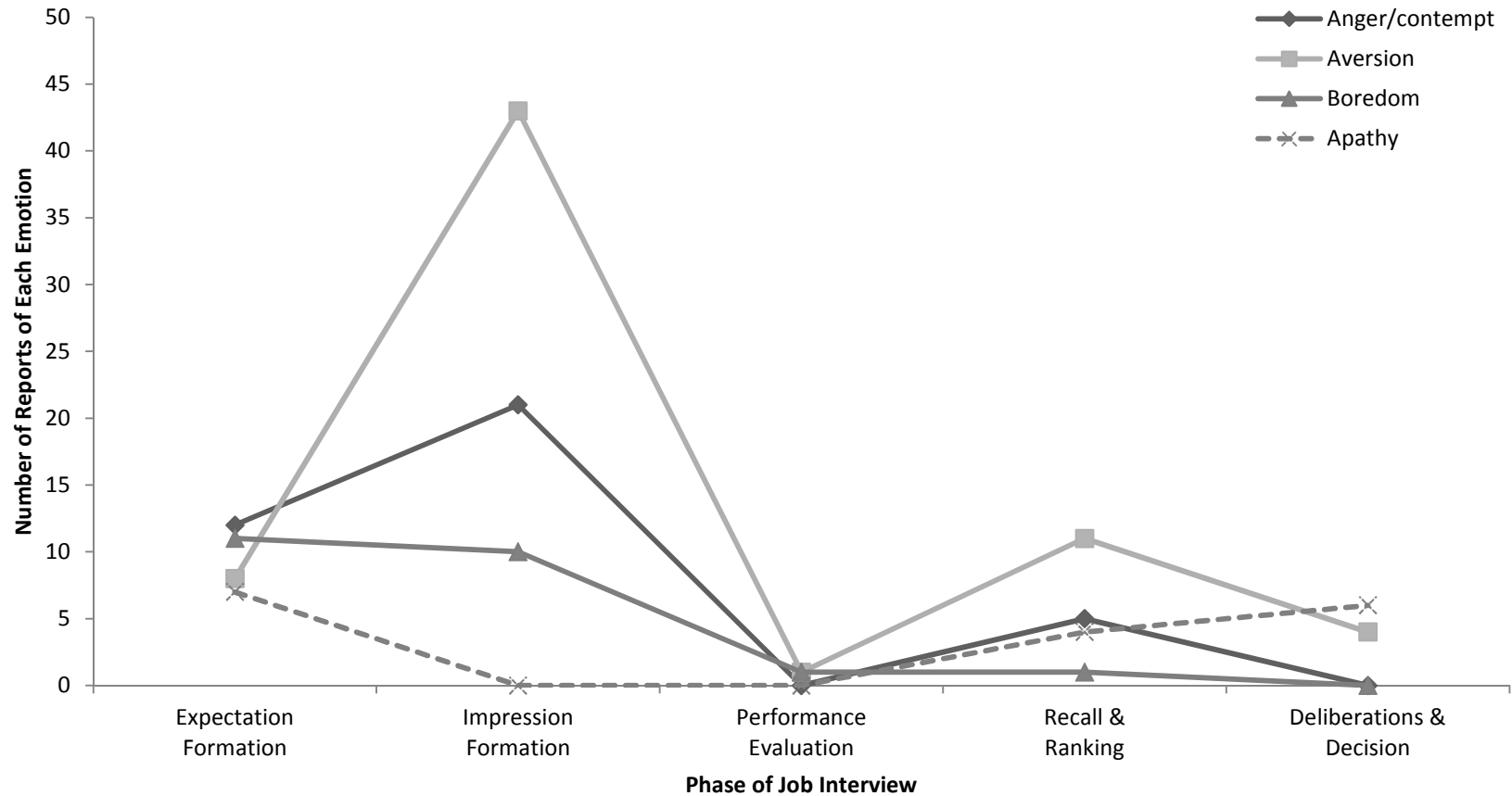


Figure 4. Frequency of Positive Emotions in Evaluation by Phase of Job Interview



**Note:** This figure represents the frequency of specific emotions used to evaluate recently interviewed job applicants, ideal candidates, and mock candidate profiles in research interviews by stage of the evaluation process. I have omitted less frequently reported emotions for the purpose of clarity.

Figure 5. Frequency of Negative/Neutral Emotions in Evaluation by Phase of Job Interview



Note: This figure represents the frequency of specific emotions used to evaluate recently interviewed job applicants, ideal candidates, and mock candidate profiles in research interviews by stage of the evaluation process. I have omitted less frequently reported emotions for the purpose of clarity.