# BEYOND BEHAVIORS: THE ROLE OF PERCEPTION IN SOCIAL SKILLS REPUTATION

by

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# ABSTRACT

E. NICOLE VOSS. Beyond Behaviors: The Role of Perception in Social Skills Reputation.
(Under the direction of DR. ERIC HEGGESTAD)

This dissertation investigates the formation of Social Skills Reputations in the workplace by examining perceptions of behaviors during structured virtual interviews. Drawing on Heggestad et al.'s (2023) Social Skills Framework, this research introduces the concept of Social Skills Impression (SSI), a building block for understanding the collective impressions that form Social Skills Reputations. By analyzing the impact of verbal, nonverbal, and vocal behaviors on SSI, the study identifies a 'just right' effect, where both excessive and insufficient behaviors can detrimentally impact SSI, underscoring the need for balanced social skill behavioral displays. The research method involved judges assessing mock virtual interviews for behavioral appropriateness, followed by separate evaluators rating interviewees' perceived social skills. The findings indicate that perceptions of nonverbal behaviors are the most predictive of SSI and challenge the traditional emphasis on behavior frequency over execution. These insights contribute to the literature by elucidating the complex dynamics of SSI in professional settings and suggest directions for future research to explore these phenomena across diverse contexts and cultures.

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This dissertation is for my parents, who gave me the moon and told me to reach for the stars; Taylor who served as my rock, my escape, and my number one fan; and myself for making the absolute most of it all.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected and dynamic workplace, the perception of an individual's social skills plays an important role in their success in many fields. Ferris et al. (2001) define social skills to encompass “interpersonal perceptiveness and the capacity to adjust one's behavior to different situational demands and to influence and control the responses of others effectively.” While possessing social skills is essential, the benefits of skills are fully actualized when others assess and corroborate these skills. The growing emphasis on social skills in the corporate world is evident from both academic and practice literature, highlighting its importance. We need our networks to believe we have social skills to maximize certain benefits in the workplace. For instance, social skills are often prioritized in job postings, sometimes even over technical or financial expertise (Sadun et al., 2022). This trend of seeking individuals with social skills reflects a broader recognition of the value of these skills in leadership and collaborative roles.

Despite the recognized importance of being perceived as socially skilled, there remains a significant gap in empirical understanding of the specific behaviors and interactions contributing to such perceptions. This gap is partly due to the fragmented nature of social skills literature, which often conflates various aspects of social competence and lacks a clear nomological network. This dissertation aims to identify and explore how the perception of behaviors leads others to develop impressions of social skills. I examine the relationships between Others’ perceptions of an Actor’s behaviors and impressions of their social skills in the context of virtual employment interviews. By focusing on perceptions of behaviors, this research seeks to untangle the complex web of factors contributing to the formation of social skill reputation discussed by Heggestad et al. (2023), offering new insights into the dynamics of social interaction and its impact on professional success.

Heggestad et al. (2023) presented the Social Skills Framework, shown in Figure 1, which wrangles years of conceptualization and experimentation within the social skills literature. Although Heggestad et al. (2023) are clear that they do not believe that social skills are a particular attribute of an Actor, Others perceive and discuss Actors as if social skills are a specific attribute (e.g., "Taylor is very socially skilled"). This represents Social Skills Reputation (SSR), defined as “the extent to which Others perceive an Actor to be socially skilled” (pg. 4). SSR is important, as reputations can provide information that influences cooperation, status, and power (Wu et al., 2016). Heggestad et al. argue that Actors are assigned SSRs through a perceptive process by which Others observe the Actor's behavior, interpret that behavior, and reach conclusions about the extent to which the Actor is socially skilled. While Heggestad et al.'s (2023) work significantly contributes to our understanding of social skills, their framework has two notable limitations.

First, their model appears to oversimplify the complex process through which SSR is constructed. I argue that the perceptive process linking behaviors to SSR involves Others observing an Actor (or narratives shared about the Actor), interpreting and evaluating the Actor's behaviors to form an impression then sharing and corroborating these impressions with others, and eventually reaching conclusions about the extent to which the Actor is socially skilled. Second, Heggestad et al.'s framework does not explicitly identify the behaviors that Others attend to when making inferences about an Actor's social skills. Identifying these key behaviors is important, as it lays the groundwork for training and assessing SSR and future theory development.

My dissertation seeks to address these gaps in two ways. First, I expand on the Social Skills Framework "perceptive process" to introduce Social Skills Impressions (SSI) as the extent

to which Others evaluate an Actor as socially skilled. I see SSI as a key initial element in the social construction of social skills reputation. Second, I inductively explore the extent to which perceptions of various behaviors are associated with the formation of SSI. To explore the formation of SSI, I first identify a set of behaviors from the existing social skills literature that, when enacted by an Actor, are likely to be seen by Others as indicative of the degree to which the Actor is socially skilled. Then, I take an exploratory approach to assess the relationship between those behaviors' perceived appropriateness or effectiveness during virtual mock job interviews and Others' impressions of their social skills (i.e., SSI.) The interviews were recorded and then edited into three different modalities: transcripts, video, and audio files. Using these files, two judges provided assessments of the behaviors exhibited in each modality. A different set of raters then assessed the social skills of the interviewee using the entire interview recording (video and audio). Using these data, I identified which perceptions are most strongly associated with SSI and explore why.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Social Skills Reputation

Reputation can be conceptualized as either a global evaluation or an evaluation of specific attributes (Connelly & McBee, 2023). SSR is a reputation specific to social skills, or "the extent to which Others perceive an Actor to be socially skilled" (Heggestad et al., 2023, p. 4). SSR is valuable independent of general personal reputation, including role competency, character, or other knowledge, skills, and abilities. This is because social skills play a distinct and increasingly important role in the workplace (Deming, 2017). Reputations are understood to be constructs formed within social contexts, and, as such, SSR may not directly correspond to concrete traits or skills. This perspective is consistent with Heggestad et al.'s view that social skills should not be considered a trait (Heggestad et al., 2023; McAbee & Connelly, 2016). SSR is, thus, not whether Actors possess a trait of being socially skilled but whether Others believe Actors can behave in what they construe as a socially skilled manner in the future. Reputation is a group-level construct that implies (whether correctly or not) greater reliability as to the perceived qualities of the Actor, as reputations account for multiple observers who agree on evaluations of qualities. However, an Actor may still hold multiple competing reputations by different groups of Others.

The utility of Social Skills Reputation lies in its dual role: guiding organizations in decision-making about individuals and influencing the personal benefits or detriments one may experience. As the adage goes, "Your reputation precedes you." When collaborating with a new team at work, these new peers may already hold beliefs about you that will influence their future interactions with you, which can be difficult to change (Ferguson et al., 2019). SSR serves as a heuristic that allows others to reduce uncertainty about an individual's ability to navigate

complex social interactions in the workplace (Kaiser & Hogan, 2011). This reputation, reflective of past successes or failures, is often utilized to predict future performance and inform managerial decisions, such as staff deployment into new or ambiguous situations (e.g., sales meetings, interviewing applicants, covering the front desk) (Hogan et al., 2020). Moreover, the fear of developing a negative reputation can motivate individuals to adhere to social norms and engage in cooperative behaviors (Semman et al., 2005).

Furthermore, a positive social skills reputation can enhance one's power, career success, and autonomy (Zinko et al., 2012; Wilmont & Ones, 2018). It signals to others the individual's resources and abilities, influencing how their actions are interpreted and contextualized (Horwitz, 2023; Johnson et al., 2002). SSR is important not only for an individual's success in roles like entrepreneurship but also for fostering collaborative relationships based on trust and reliability (Baron & Markman, 2003; Human & Biesanz, 2013). Reputations are most likely to form when perceptions deviate from the norm (Zinko et al., 2007; Zinko & Rubin, 2015), suggesting that individuals are unlikely to develop a reputation for having average social skills. The negative impressions of an individual's social skills can have a disproportionately negative impact on their reputation. This effect is compounded by the psychological tendency of observers to be more strongly affected by adverse events than positive ones (Ito et al., 1998; Williams et al., 2022).

**2.1.1 Social Skills Reputation Formation.** Ultimately, SSR is constructed based on Others' impressions of an Actor's social skills. While Heggestad et al.'s framework, as depicted in Figure 1, suggests that social behaviors lead to SSR through a perceptive process, it does not provide a detailed explanation of how this process unfolds. Specifically, Heggestad et al. do not offer a clear articulation of the transition from observing an Actor's behavior to the formation of

a reputation, which is essentially a shared impression among multiple individuals. This gap indicates that impressions likely evolve over time, influenced not only by the Actor's intentional behaviors but also by their salient personal characteristics, achievements, and behaviors as observed or reported by Others (Ferris et al., 2003). This dissertation explores a crucial aspect of this perceptive process: how exhibited behaviors contribute to the impression of an Actor's social skills.

Evidence suggests that people often judge someone's social skills based on both intentional and unintentional behaviors observed in social interactions (Toth et al., 2019). For instance, a person might be perceived as socially adept if they instinctively smile during a conversation, making others feel comfortable and engaged, even if the smile was not a consciously planned action. Additionally, these perceptions can be influenced by factors beyond the behaviors themselves, such as biases or misinterpretations that lead to errors in judgment (Connelly & McAbee, 2023). Therefore, to fully understand the formation of SSR, it is essential to delve deeper into this perceptive process. It acts as a foundational element in building SSR, wherein various observed behaviors, coupled with the subjective interpretations of these observations, contribute to the overall impression of an individual's social skills. For example, in a team meeting, a person who actively listens and nods in agreement could be perceived as collaborative and empathetic, contributing positively to their social skills reputation. However, this impression may also be colored by the observer's prior experiences or expectations, highlighting the complex interplay of behaviors and perceptual biases in shaping SSR.

**2.1.2 Social Skills Impression.** Here, I present Social Skill Impression (SSI) as the impact of initial signal-driven perceptions and subsequent inferences on one's ability to accomplish social goals in the future. This definition builds on Swider et al. (2022)

conceptualization of first impressions but incorporates Heggestad et al.'s (2023) use of signaling theory to detail how behaviors serve as signals that carry information regarding the qualities of the Actor (Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 2002). Signaling theory proposes a mechanism through which two parties resolve information asymmetry (Spence, 2002). Spence refers to signals as "things that are visible and that are in part designed to communicate" (p. 434). Signals can be intentional or automatic and represent both positive and negative information about the Actor (Taj, 2016). Important to signaling theory is that Others (i.e., receivers) may interpret signals differently from how the signalers intended (Perkins & Hendry, 2005; Srivastava, 2001). Signaling is important because the reduction in the asymmetry of information (e.g., How socially skilled is someone?) cannot simply be expressed (i.e., "I have social skills") but needs to be established through the acceptance of signals by the receiver to corroborate claims and establish evidence of having social skills.

As indicated by signaling theory, the Other (receiver) plays an important role in interpreting signals (Perkins & Hendry, 2005; Srivastava, 2001); therefore, behaviors intended to signal positive social skills have the potential to result in negative impressions, such as being perceived as manipulative or awkward (Treadway et al., 2007). The Other attends to (or does not attend to) those signals and develops impressions of the Actor based on their interpretations of those signals. While all perceptible behaviors can serve as signals, some signals might influence SSI more than others. Additionally, the presence of any specific signal does not automatically lead to a positive impression of social skills. Others must receive signals, attend to signals they view as important, and evaluate them as appropriate and/or effective. Only then can the Observer form an impression regarding the social skills of the Actor.

**2.1.3 The Importance of Perception.** When Others observe an Actor, their evaluation is not an unbiased assessment of the signal itself but rather a perception filtered through their own psychological lens. This interpretative process underscores that the Others' perception is shaped by their experiences, expectations, and biases, ultimately driving the evaluation of an Actor's social skills. Therefore, while an Actor may send specific signals with the intention of achieving a social goal, it is the perception of these signals by Others that forms the basis of their SSR. For example, smiling big in an employment interview may help an Actor be perceived as friendly and competent by one interviewer. Still, that same Actor can be perceived as unintelligent by an interviewer from a different culture (Kyrs et al., 2016). Noise, such as halo bias, positivity bias, and negativity bias, can also impact a person's perception of an Actor's behavior (Connelly & McAbee, 2023; Gräf & Unkelbach, 2016). However, given the strength of social norms in most cultures, it is likely that Others will generally agree to some degree on what constitutes appropriate or effective signals in the proper context (Chung & Rimal, 2016). Thus, this dissertation focuses on the evaluation of signals, not the presence or quantity of signals.

While behaviors measured through frequency counts (e.g., number of head nods) and time measures (e.g., time spent talking) may be less prone to reliability and validity issues for some constructs (Banks et al., 2021), such measures often assume a linear or quantitative relationship between the number of behaviors and the impressions formed by others. However, at least in the context of the perception relevant to social skills, I argue that it is not the frequency of the behaviors that drive impressions but the proper execution of behaviors as signals given the expectations for the social context (Ferris et al., 2002, 2007; Huffcut et al., 2001). Signals are often only effective to the extent they lead to the desired perceptions, impressions, and subsequent behaviors of targeted Others (Ferris et al., 2007).

The appraisal of signals results from both the appropriateness and effectiveness of executing signals (Bolino et al., 2003; Melchers et al., 2020). For example, positive signals such as smiling and offering compliments must appear genuine and not manipulative to benefit the Actor (Treadway et al., 2007). Thus, in the current study, I move beyond the simple occurrence of behaviors to focus on Others' perceptions of the appropriateness of signals and what led them to perceive those signals how they did. When a signal is perceived as inappropriate, I also capture the nature of the inappropriateness (e.g., whether eye contact was inappropriate because there was too much or too little). Particular attention is given to signals deemed inappropriate, as negative perceptions tend to be more influential and memorable (Cone & Ferguson, 2015; Van Dessel et al., 2019). This is especially relevant in controlled settings, like a structured interview used in this study, where the opportunity to exhibit overtly positive social behaviors—such as building rapport—is limited, thereby emphasizing the impact of negative evaluations SSI. While many signals have been identified as relevant to social skills in general, it is unclear which signals are most influential for SSI.

### 2.2 Types of Signals

To organize possible signals of social skills, this study employs Ekman's (1957) framework, which categorizes communication into three distinct channels: verbal, nonverbal, and vocal. Verbal is the "content of an organism's spoken statements" (p. 141), vocal is the "timbre, pitch, and intensity of a spoken statement" (p. 141), and nonverbal is "body movements of the organism," including "motor expression" (p. 141). Verbal, nonverbal, and vocal signals each carry unique information that shapes the Other's perception (Nagel et al., 2012; Jacob et al., 2012). Separating signals into these channels allows a look at the signals with less interference from other signals.

Within the context of an interpersonal interaction, a person will send verbal, nonverbal, and vocal signals that influence the impressions that others hold of the individual, including their impressions of the person's social skills. However, what signals lead to impressions of social skills needs further examination. Below, I argue for specific signals within the verbal, nonverbal, and vocal categories that may relate to SSI. These signals were selected based on theoretically relevant behaviors and a systematic review of over 500 social skills-related construct measure items. Table 1 provides a list of selected signals and the definitions used for the study. As stated, signals are often received differently than the Actor intended (Connelly et al., 2011). Thus, in this study, I focus not on the presence or quantification of signals but on perceptions of those signals being appropriate and/or effective.

**2.2.1 Verbal Signals.** Verbal statements, including the choice of vocabulary, articulation, and content, play a significant role in how people interact in social interactions. Verbal signals are the language content used in speech. This is differentiated from vocal signals, which focus more on the delivery of the content. During an interaction, the content of the conversation can be used to influence others, present an image of oneself, obtain a goal, or convey interest. Verbal behaviors can signal social skills both through the content of the dialogue and the perceived ability to articulate ideas.

In an interview setting, social skills can be signaled by providing evidence of past positive social experiences and demonstrating interpersonal competence during the interaction. The former can be accomplished through sharing experiences (i.e., a time when communication was key to problem-solving), while the latter is done through speaking positively of others, complementing, telling a joke, etc. To effectively use dialogue, the Actor needs to communicate ideas clearly in conversation. When used inappropriately or ineffectively, verbal signals can also

lead to negative evaluations (Crant, 1996), such as negative affective reactions (Balkan & Soran, 2013), being perceived as manipulative (Treadway et al., 2007), negative performance ratings (Harris et al., 2007; Melchers et al., 2020). An example of this is what researchers call the self-promoters paradox– when individuals overemphasize their credentials, they appear self-interested, resulting in negative perceptions by others (Jones & Pittman 1982).

**2.2.2 Nonverbal Signals.** Perception of nonverbal signals plays a vital role in interpersonal interactions (Phutela, 2015; Rutter & Stephenson, 1979). Examples of nonverbal signals include smiling at the appropriate time (Andrews & Kacmar, 2001; Schneider et al., 1996), choosing appropriate clothing (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Robles, 2012), use of eye contact (Rubin & Martin, 1994), and display of emotions (Rentz et al., 2002; Riggio, 1986). Nonverbal signals can help drive many social perceptions and outcomes. Bodily movements, such as hand gestures and posture, can be perceived as appropriate or awkward, influencing other people's social coordination judgments (Kadambi et al., 2020). Eye contact is particularly important to social interactions. For example, persuasion attempts can be more successful with appropriate eye contact (Guéguen & Jacob, 2002). However, not all eye contact is good, as prolonged eye contact can indicate insincerity (Williams et al., 2009). The focus is then not just on the presence of behaviors but the perception of that behavior as a signal by the receiver—SSI results from the target determining that the appropriate nonverbal signals were effectively sent.

**2.2.3 Vocal Signals.** Within communication, vocal signals encompass various auditory behaviors. These signals exclude the content of the spoken words and represent various elements such as pitch, volume, speech rate, hesitation, and other non-linguistic auditory information (Imhof, 2010). These acoustic behaviors play a pivotal role in conveying and receiving messages. For instance, vocal signals can effectively communicate emotions and attitudes, with

excitement often reflected in the pace and volume of speech (Higgins & Judge, 2004; Jiang & Pell, 2017). Additionally, vocal signals such as using filler sounds and stuttering can indicate nervousness or a lack of confidence (Robles, 2012; Riggio & Throckmorton, 1998b).

For example, a speaker's enthusiastic tone, characterized by a faster pace and increased volume, conveys excitement and confidence (Kamiloğlu & Fischer, 2020). However, the relationships between specific vocal signals and perceptions can be nuanced and may depend on the presence of corresponding nonverbal signals (De Waele et al., 2018). This highlights the necessity of scrutinizing each communication category separately to disentangle their individual and combined effects on perceptions. In essence, vocal signals represent a crucial dimension of social communication, impacting how Others perceive individuals and their emotional responses attributed to their interactions. By examining the distinct roles of various vocal signals, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of their influence on SSIs.

### 2.3 The Current Study

This study explores how the perceptions of various signals influence impressions of social skills. Through this research, I can begin to understand the connection between perceptions behaviors (i.e., signals) and SSI, a key element in the formation of SSR. I used a mock employment interview context to represent a goal-directed social interaction. Employment interviews offer an interesting and appropriate opportunity to study social skills for four reasons. First, social skills are frequently formally and informally assessed in interview contexts (Huffcut et al., 2001). Social skills are a sought-after skill in the job market and can be directly evaluated during an interview (Kell et al., 2017; Morgeson et al., 2005) or can influence the overall evaluation of applicants during the interview (Higgins & Judge, 2004; Levashina et al., 2014).

Second, structured employment interviews offer an opportunity for a controlled dyadic social interaction that removes variability presented in other social interactions by giving control to the interviewer to lead the direction of the interaction. Such control over the interaction is important because it allows for consistency across participants and gives each participant the same opportunities to present signals. Third, employment interviews offer an opportunity to accomplish a social goal (i.e., a job offer) by creating a positive interaction. Thus, participants are motivated to enact effective social signals. Fourth, evaluations are made solely based on this interaction because the interviewer and interviewee have no prior relationship.

While I selected the signals to be evaluated in this study based on theoretical foundations from research on the development of impressions in interpersonal interactions and consistent with aspects of social behaviors proposed by Heggestad et al. (2023), I did not have enough of a theoretical foundation on which to offer formal hypotheses regarding which signals would be more relevant for SSI in the interview context. Thus, I chose an inductive approach to understanding the relationships between the specific perception of signals and the impression of Actors' social skills. By establishing foundational knowledge on what behaviors are perceived to be most relevant to evaluations of social skills, future research can better assess social skills from the point of view of others, establish training and leadership programs that seek to increase social skills in the workplace, and even begin to address the challenges neuroatypical individuals might face in being perceived at work.

# CHAPTER 3: METHODS

## 3.1 Participants

Data were collected as part of a larger project on interview experiences. Recruitment emails were sent to eligible university students and university staff explaining that the study includes a virtual mock interview that can help prepare those entering the job market. Participants who completed both a testing session and an interview session were given one $15 Amazon gift card. Participants were told they were participating in a research study looking at applicant experiences in job interviews. They were not told they were being rated on their social skills. The final sample of interviewees, $N$=100, consisted of upper-level undergraduates, business students, and staff from a large university. Of these, 70% self-identified as female, and 3% self-described their sex as non-binary or non-conforming. The racial/ethnic distribution of the sample was as follows: 35% white, 19% Black or African American, 26% Asian or Asian American, 6% Hispanic or Latino, and 14% identified as other or more than one race. Additionally, 89% of participants reported being students. Age information was not collected.

## 3.2 Procedure

Mock virtual employment interviews were conducted via Zoom video conferencing. At the scheduled time of the interview session, a lab assistant greeted the participants and directed them to a Qualtrics survey link in the chat function of Zoom that contained the informed consent. After completing the questionnaires, the interviewer (a trained lab assistant) joined the video conference, and the lab assistant exited the Zoom for the job interview session. The interview consisted of four structured behavioral interview questions, as shown in Table 2. Once the participant had responded to the fourth question, the lab assistant rejoined the video conference, and the interviewer exited. The lab assistant then instructed the participant to complete a second

set of measures via a Qualtrics survey link, which included the global measure of social skills. During this time, the interviewer also completed a set of ratings about the participant, including the measure of SSI. The mean length of the interview was 6 minutes and 10 seconds (*SD* = 2 minutes and 5 seconds), with a range from 3 minutes and 1 second to 14 minutes and 50 seconds.

Eleven members of the lab team served as interviewers. Interviewers received a two-hour training session on how to conduct interviews from a graduate student with experience conducting interviews. As part of that training, interviewers were instructed to give participants no verbal or nonverbal feedback during the interview so interviewer reactions could remain as consistent as possible across interviews. (Participants were told they would not receive verbal or nonverbal feedback during the interview and not to take this behavior as a reflection of their interview performance.) The interviewers were matched to a participant of the same sex when possible in order to reduce the influence of attraction and gender dynamics. To ensure no technical interruptions were present that impacted the interview, both the participant and the interviewer were asked to rate the overall quality of the video and the audio (1 = “very poor quality”, 5 = “excellent quality”) and to report any technical interruptions that occurred during the interview.

Data for this study was collected as components of a larger study. I only present information below about the components of this data relevant to the current study. For the larger study, 150 individuals participated in the interview. The sample for the current study was drawn from this set of interviews. Specifically, I selected the first 100 interviews for which no meaningful technical interruptions were reported, as indicated by a score of 3 or above on both quality check items.

### 3.3 Measures

**3.3.1 Social Skills Impression (Other Rating).** A modified version of the Ferris et al. (2001) social skills measure was completed by the interviewer and two trained raters who watched the video recording of the interview. Immediately after the interview, the interviewers left the Zoom room and completed an online questionnaire that included the Ferris et al. measure. The two raters, trained graduate students in industrial/organizational psychology, rated each participant on the Ferris et al. items immediately after watching the entirety of the interview. When responding to the items, these raters worked independently and were instructed to consider the participant's behavior during the entire interview. Raters did not know the full scope of the study but were given the same Ferris et al. (2007) definition of social skills to consider when making ratings.

Impressions of social skills were measured using an adapted version of the Ferris et al. (2001) social skills measure, where judges were asked to make inferences about the candidate's social skills. The scale was adapted in two ways. First, the instructions were modified to fit the situation ("During the interview, what were your perceptions of the participant?"). Second, the items were modified to fit the referent. Specifically, the referent was changed from the "self" to the "participant," and the wording of the items was altered or rearranged to fit the situation better. For example, the item "In social situations, it is always clear to me exactly what to say and do" was changed to "I feel that it is always clear to the participant exactly what to say and do in social situations." Interviewers and raters responded to each of the seven items using a five-point point-Likert-type scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”). Appendix B includes the original Ferris et al. (2001) items and my adaptation of each. The average of all seven items was used to represent the SSR score for each rater. Intraclass Correlation Coefficient

(ICC) analysis was conducted to assess the reliability of raters. The ICC for the average ratings by random raters (ICC2,3) was found to be 0.97, $F(99, 1980) = 44$, $p < .001$, indicating strong reliability. The 95% confidence interval ranged from 0.96 to 0.98. Given this level of reliability, all three raters' scores were averaged to get the Social Skills Impression average.

To further strengthen the validation of my SSI measurement approach, I took an additional step. Alongside the adapted Ferris et al. (2001) social skills measure, I introduced a Global SSI item: "During the interview, I feel that the applicant demonstrated excellent social skills." This item was explicitly designed to assess general social skills, ensuring a valid and direct evaluation of social competencies. The interviewers and the raters independently rated this item using a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”). This supplementary item served as a cross-validation measure for my social skills assessment. The Intraclass Correlation Coefficient for average raters with absolute agreement (ICC1k) was 0.95, $F(98, 3168) = 20$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.94, 0.96], indicating a strong level of agreement. An average was taken across the three raters to assign a Global Social Skills Impression score.

**3.3.2 Signal Ratings.** Six judges evaluated the signals exhibited by the participants during the interview process. These judges were divided into three distinct categories: verbal (text transcript), nonverbal (video without sound), and vocal (audio only). Judges in this study were undergraduate research assistants who provided ratings over a two-year period, with each individual's participation spanning approximately four months. They received training on recognizing biases and upholding ethical research standards. Training for verbal, vocal, and nonverbal rating was conducted separately, ensuring judges understood the Ferris et al. (2007) definition of social skills. Through discussion and examples, judges learned to identify behaviors as appropriate or inappropriate according to social norms within an interview context. The

training, lasting between 45 minutes to an hour, also included a review of the rating scale and clarification of signals to promote consistent interpretation. Judges used personal judgment to evaluate social norms, aiming for consistency in behavior identification rather than agreement on appropriateness. Three raters were replaced for delayed ratings and one for poor rating fidelity.

For each of the 24 signals, two judges independently assessed appropriateness or effectiveness, utilizing their personal standards based on prevailing social norms within the employment interview context. When a judge perceived a signal as inappropriate, they were instructed to specify their reasons from a predefined list. This study concentrated on inappropriate ratings based on the understanding that negative perceptions typically have a greater impact on perceptions (Cone & Ferguson, 2015; Van Dessel et al., 2019). Moreover, the controlled nature of the situational environment (Mischel et al., 1973; Meyer, 2009) was not conducive to exhibiting behaviors indicative of strong social skills, such as rapport-building, leading to a focus on identifying average or below-average social skills. It is possible that the judges do not consistently agree on the appropriateness of the signals. This variability would suggest differing perspectives on what constitutes appropriate or effective social behaviors or that social behaviors were subject to perceptual ambiguity.

I could not identify an existing comprehensive measure of verbal, nonverbal, and vocal social skill behaviors. Therefore, I created one for the present study. I compiled 594 items from measures commonly used to assess social skills constructs. I then examined these items to find those that included content related to signals (e.g., "I try to look others in the eye when I speak with them" (Rubin & Martin, 1994); "I smile and laugh at appropriate times" (Schneider et al., 1996)). Additional items were created to capture vocal signals, such as pace and volume, that research has shown to be used in perceiving social signals like confidence, excitement, respect,

and persuasion (Brown et al., 2014; Jiang & Pell, 2017). In all, my examination of these items led to the identification of 24 signals: 12 verbal signals (e.g., *vocabulary, humor,* etc.)., seven nonverbal signals (e.g., *eye contact, emotions,* etc.)., and five vocal signals (e.g., *pace, volume,* etc.)., and Table 1 provides a complete listing of the 24 signals. I then created specific behavioral rating items for each of these signals. Rating responses varied across signals and are described below. See Appendix C for the complete measures.

**3.3.2.1 Verbal Signals.** Two judges rated the verbal signals identified as potentially indicative of social skills. Transcripts from the interview were given to the judges to read; this was done so that judges could focus exclusively on the content and quality of responses, not behavior or delivery. A denaturalized approach to transcriptions focused on the meaning created by words and not involuntary vocalizations and accents but on what was said, not how it is being said (Oliver et al., 2005). Thus, filler words, stutters, pauses, involuntary vocalizations, and other idiosyncratic elements were removed. Two trained research assistants and I reviewed each transcript to ensure consistency. The two judges read the transcripts, and each independently rated the verbal signals of the participants. Judges were asked to assess the appropriateness or effectiveness of the participants' affect, articulation, communication, details provided, flattery, humor, interruptions, persuasion, questions asked, response length, problem-solving, and vocabulary (e.g., "The applicant's vocabulary use was appropriate for the situation." “Yes”/ “No”). If "No" was selected, raters were asked to indicate why, using a set of possible descriptors (i.e., "If NO, why? Select all that apply"). An additional "NA" response option was included for signals that may not have been used in the interview (e.g., (*verbal) humor*).

**3.3.2.2 Nonverbal Signals.** Two judges individually evaluated seven participants' nonverbal signals during the interview process. The specific signals that judges rated included

*dress/clothing, emotions, eye contact, facial expressions, hand movements, posture,* and *smiles.* The audio component of the interview video recordings was intentionally removed to ensure a focused assessment of nonverbal signals. Each judge independently viewed all the video recordings (with no audio), providing assessments for each participant immediately after watching the respective videos.

Judges were instructed to assess a series of signals as appropriate or effective (e.g., "Eye Contact: Was it appropriate?" “Yes”/ “No”). In cases where the judge responded with "No," they were prompted to specify the reasons for their assessment by selecting from a predefined list of options. For instance, if the judge found issues with the *dress/clothing*, they were further prompted to specify whether the *dress/clothing* was considered "too casual" or "too formal."

**3.3.2.3 Vocal Signals**. Two judges assessed vocal signals that may be indicative of social skills, which included *excitement, filler sounds, humor, pace,* and *volume*. Only the audio from the interview was given to the judges; this was done so that judges could focus exclusively on the participants' vocal signals and not be influenced by nonverbal and verbal signals. Judges were instructed to refrain from considering the responses' quality or content. The two judges independently listened to each audio clip and rated the vocal signals of the participants. Judges were asked if they perceived the participants' behavior as appropriate or effective (e.g., "Pace to their speech: Was it appropriate?" “Yes”/ “No”). If the rater responded "No," they were asked to indicate why (i.e., "If NO, why? Select all that apply") from a list of prompts.

**3.3.2.4 Creating Scale Scores.** In light of the absence of a universally correct response, this study refrained from pursuing tests of statistical agreement, such as Kappa, as these tests do not account for the contextual nature of social behaviors. Instead, each participant's signals were categorized into one of three levels. These levels were defined as follows: appropriate, which

signified that both raters independently agreed that the signal was appropriate or effectively executed; equivocal, which captured cases when one judge perceived the signal as appropriate (or effective) while the perceived the signal as inappropriate, indicating a difference in judgment; and inappropriate, categorized when both raters agreed that the signal appeared inappropriate (or ineffective). For verbal signals, instances where raters responded with "NA" (Not Applicable) were coded as appropriate to account for the context of an employment interview, where some behaviors might not be obligatory (Appendix C provides a list of signals offering this "NA" option).

Furthermore, composite scores for verbal, nonverbal, and vocal communication were generated by calculating the average for each channel of communication. Within these composites, appropriate was coded as 1, equivocal as 0.5, and inappropriate as 0. In this scoring system, values closer to 1 signify that the signal was rated as more strongly inappropriate, providing a nuanced evaluation of each signal's effectiveness in the interview context.

**3.3.4 Control Variables.** Participant sex, race, and interview experience were collected in the pre-screening process as control variables. I control for sex given that past research has shown that males tend to receive higher social skill ratings than females (Baron et al., 2006; Shahani-Denning et al., 2010) and because males and females have been shown to use social skill-related behaviors differently (Bolino & Turnley, 2003). Race was included because social skills tend to be rated more highly in same-race pairs (Ouazad, 2014), and stereotyping can impact observer ratings of attributes (Bergsieker et al., 2012). I also control for interview experience, as experience with job interviews may impact behavior (Barrick et al., 2010). Interview experience was measured as the number of past job interviews. Participants also completed computer-administered measures used for the larger study during this time.

I also included the participant's attractiveness as a control variable, given that research has shown it can impact observer ratings of social skills (Baron et al., 2006; Langley et al., 2013). The attractiveness of each participant was rated by 100 judges (50 males, 50 females) hired through Prolific. Judges were shown a five-second screen capture image of the participant displaying a smile obtained from the interview recordings. Attractiveness was rated on a ten-point Likert-type scale (1 = very unattractive to 10 = very attractive). The ICC2,100 for these ratings was .97. Attractiveness was measured as the average rating across the 100 judges. The average attractiveness rating across all participants was 4.98 (*SD* = 1.04) and ranged from 3.07 to 7.57.

# CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## 4.1 Results

Table 3 presents the study variables' means, standard deviations, and correlations. The observed correlations largely align with expectations. Notably, Social Skills Impression (SSI) showed a robust correlation with the single-item Global Social Skills Impression ($r$ = .91), and the two measures of social skills correlated similarly with each of the other study variables. These findings both lend credence to the validity of the adapted Ferris et al. scale (2001) and indicate that the SSI effectively captures the essence of social skills as perceived by Others. Due to this high correlation, only the SSI score from the seven-item adapted Ferris et al. (2001) scale was used in subsequent analyses. Additionally, SSI demonstrated statistically significant correlations with the verbal, vocal, and nonverbal composite signals, underscoring a discernible link between impressions of social skills and the perception of specific observable behaviors. Both the vocal and nonverbal composite signals had the strongest relationships with SSI, consistent with existing literature emphasizing the critical role of vocal and nonverbal cues in social interactions (Archer& Akert, 1977; Hall et al., 2019). In considering these relationships, it is important to keep in mind that the ratings came from different sources. That is, the individuals who rated SSI were different from those who rated the verbal, nonverbal, and vocal signals. Thus, these correlations cannot be due to common method variance.

Additionally, SSI displayed relatively weak, but still statistically significant, associations with sex and attractiveness. This suggests that in my sample, individuals identified as female and those deemed attractive were somewhat more likely to be perceived as socially skilled. A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to explore the impact of verbal, nonverbal, and vocal signals on SSI above and beyond the effects of sex and attractiveness. As shown in Table

4, in the initial hierarchical regression model, attractiveness was a significant predictor of SSI (β = 0.13, $p$ <.05, 95% CI [0.01, 0.25]), while sex approached significance (β = −0.22, $p$ = 0.07, 95% CI [-0.46, 0.02]). This model accounted for 9.3% of the variance in SSI ($R^2$=.093, $p$ <.01, 95% CI [.01, .20]). With the addition of verbal, nonverbal, and vocal composite scores, the model's variance explanation increased significantly ($\Delta R^2$=.243, $p$ <.01, 95% CI [.10, .38]), resulting in a total of 33.6% of the variance accounted for, $R^2$=.336. In this expanded model, nonverbal (β = −1.00, $p$ <.01, 95% CI [-1.61, -0.39]) and vocal (β = −1.21, $p$ <.01, 95% CI [-1.90, -0.52]), composite scores were significant predictors of SSI, suggesting that these behavioral signals are more influential in determining SSI than sex and attractiveness.

**4.2 Verbal Signals**

Verbal signals were assessed by judges who read transcripts of the interviews and then evaluated a set of 12 signals as appropriate (or effective) or inappropriate. If viewed as inappropriate, judges were asked to indicate from a set list of responses why they felt the signal was inappropriate. To determine which of the verbal signals were associated with SSI, a series of ANOVAs were conducted with signal appropriateness as the independent variable and SSI as the dependent variable. Table 5 provides mean SSI scores for each group (appropriate, equivocal, and inappropriate) for each of the 12 verbal signals.

Among the 12 verbal signals analyzed, only *affect* and *communication* displayed statistically significant differences across the three appropriateness levels. Subsequent Games-Howell post hoc tests, which are suitable for samples with heterogeneity and unequal sizes (Sauder & DeMars, 2019), revealed significant differences only between appropriate and inappropriate ratings for *communication*. Participants whom the judges felt engaged in effective communication were seen as more socially skilled ($M$ = 3.75) than participants whom they

perceived to be ineffective in their communication ($M$ = 3.26). In the context of this study, communication is considered a distinct signal exhibited by verbally demonstrating an ability to communicate with others. It encompasses the verbal expressions candidates use to convey their ability to interact, exchange information, and collaborate effectively with others, either through the storytelling of past communication experiences or through demonstrating communication skills during the interview. Effective communication facilitates smoother information exchange, minimizes the risk of misconstruing information, and lessens the burden on the other party to lead the conversation.

Strong communication skills are crucial during employment interviews and are often seen as a default expectation (Coffelt et al., 2016). When these skills are not adequately signaled through behavior, observers may raise concerns about an individual's ability to navigate future situations requiring effective communication. Furthermore, this insight emphasizes that being perceived as socially skilled is not merely about possessing these skills but effectively signaling them through behavior. While communicating effectively is beneficial, it is equally important to convey this ability to Others, enhancing Other's impression of their social skills.

It is worth noting that the signals of *(verbal) humor* and interruption were infrequent in the context of my study, which is not surprising given the strong nature of the interview situation (Meyer et al., 2010). Judges were instructed that if they considered the absence of these signals acceptable or within the norms of the situation, they should rate the signal as "NA," which was then coded as appropriate. (*Verbal*) *humor* was only perceived once as inappropriate and once as appropriate. The scarcity of humor signals may imply that these particular behaviors are not expected within a structured interview context.

Participant sex and attractiveness were assessed as covariates to evaluate their influence on the relationship between verbal signals and SSI. Attractiveness and sex were chosen as covariates due to their demonstrated relationship with SSI scores, as evidenced in Table 3. The ANCOVA analyses revealed that while these covariates were often statistically significant, they did not alter the pattern of significance across the signals. The relationship between perceptions of communication and SSI is not explained by the attractiveness or sex of the interviewee alone.

**4.2.1 Insights from Judge Explanations.** When judges saw a signal as inappropriate, they were asked to indicate what it was about the signal that led them to view it as inappropriate. The decision to focus specifically on inappropriate ratings was grounded in the recognition that negative perceptions are often more impactful (Cone & Ferguson, 2015; Van Dessel et al., 2019) and given that the strength of the situation (Mischel et al., 1973; Meyer, 2009) did not allow for opportunities to show strong positive social behaviors, such as building rapport. Across all verbal signals, only a relatively small number of those behaviors were seen as inappropriate, meaning that the analyses of these signals are based on small sets of observations.

Table 6 presents qualitative information regarding why judges perceived signals as inappropriate or ineffective. For example, Table 5 shows that 39 raters perceived the participant's *vocabulary* as inappropriate. As shown in Table Y, when asked about why they saw the behavior as inappropriate, 35 judges indicated that the participant's vocabulary was "too informal". On average, these participants had SSI scores of 3.52 (*SD* = 0.66). Conversely, judges viewed the participant's *vocabulary* as inappropriate because it was "too formal" on only six occasions and had a corresponding average SSI score of 3.49 (*SD* = 0.27). In contrast, the average SSI score for participants who were seen as using appropriate vocabulary was 3.68 (*SD* = 0.66). While statistically significant differences are difficult to test and interpret in these

sample sizes, this pattern suggests that *vocabulary* that is either too informal or too formal is detrimental to SSI and that there are multiple ways for signals to be perceived as inappropriate.

The qualitative analysis showed that various forms of excess in *articulation, details provided*, and *response length* did not appear to hurt SSI, even when perceived by the judges as inappropriate. For instance, when excessive detail was provided, the average SSI score was 3.82 (*SD* = 0.35). This average was higher than when details were perceived as insufficient (*M* = 3.39, *SD* = 0.69) and appropriate (*M* = 3.71, *SD* = 0.68). This trend suggests that in employment interviews, a richer verbal engagement through thorough articulation, a high level of detail, and extended response lengths are not only permissible but may be interpreted as indicators of good social skills. Another noteworthy finding pertained to *interruptions*. Although a limited number of *interruptions* were considered inappropriate (*n* = 4), it is interesting that these *interruptions* were associated with higher SSI scores. As shown in Table 5, participants judged to have appropriate or equivocal *interruptions* had SSI mean scores of 3.60 (*SD* = 0.60) and 3.65 (*SD* = 1.10), respectively. When *interruptions* were perceived as rude or deemed unnecessary, the participants received higher SSI scores, with means of 3.91 (*SD* = 0.77) and 3.82 (*SD* = 1.03), respectively, albeit in an exceptionally small sample. These findings, although not statistically significant in the ANOVA model, highlight that *interruptions* were among the few signals leading to higher SSI scores when judged as inappropriate.

It is important to consider that while judges only read a transcript of the interaction, raters assessing SSI saw a video recording (including audio) of the entire interaction. While judges reading transcripts of the interviews might find interruptions disruptive in isolation, these interpretations might appear more natural in the flow of conversations, taking conversation cadence, gaps, and voice inflections into account. This could be explained by the possibility that

when viewed holistically, interruptions may signal engagement (Cafaro et al., 2016) or active listening (Huang et al., 2017), both valuable in social interactions. Discursive verbal and non-verbal practices help interaction partners negotiate and co-construct a shared understanding (Huang et al., 2020). Thus, the observation that interruptions were seen as inappropriate by the judges while corresponding with higher SSI could be an artifact of the study's methodology. Since judges were not evaluating the entire interaction but only specific verbal segments, this might have influenced their perception of the appropriateness and impact of interruptions.

### 4.3 Nonverbal Signals

Nonverbal signals were assessed by judges who viewed video recordings of the interviews with the sound removed and then evaluated a set of seven signals as appropriate or inappropriate. If viewed as inappropriate, judges were asked to indicate from a set list of responses why they felt the signal was inappropriate. As indicated in Table 5, individual ANOVAs for *emotions, eye contact, facial expressions, posture,* and *smiles* indicated statistically significant differences in SSI. Games-Howell post hoc tests were conducted for these five signals and identified statically significant differences between appropriate and inappropriate ratings for each, with appropriate ratings consistently associated with higher SSI scores.

Interestingly, for *facial expressions*, the Games-Howell test also showed statistically significant differences observed between appropriate and equivocal ratings, with appropriate ratings again yielding higher SSI scores. The use of appropriate *facial expressions* corresponds with the highest observed SSI scores across all signals ($M = 4.02$, $SD = .64$). Given that virtual Zoom interactions are designed to focus on the face, it’s unsurprising this provided the largest opportunity to excel in SSI. The inclusion of sex and attractiveness into the ANCOVA models

did not significantly alter these relationships, indicating that these relationships are not due to attractiveness or sex alone.

Raters frequently disagreed on the appropriateness of nonverbal signals, including *emotions, facial expressions, hand movements,* and *smiles*. In over 50% of the cases involving these signals, judges disagreed on their appropriateness, with one seeing the participants' behavior as appropriate and the other seeing it as inappropriate. The frequency of equivocal ratings in nonverbal signal judgments possibly indicates the interpersonal differences between judges and the complexity of interpreting nonverbal signals. This also further highlights the importance of perceptions in social interactions, as two Others viewing the same signals can interrupt their appropriateness for the situation differently.

For instance, in the case of assessing *emotions*, judges differed in their evaluations for 65 (of the 100) participants, underscoring the challenging nature of perceiving emotions, especially visually (Kraus, 2017). Similarly, in assessing *facial expressions*, there was disagreement in 62 instances with a mean SSI of 3.58 (*SD* = 0.56). In contrast, when a *facial expression* was perceived as appropriate, the mean SSI was 4.02 *(SD* = 0.64). In contrast, this discrepancy might suggest that ambiguously appropriate facial expressions could be interpreted less favorably or may reflect variability in judges' leniency when evaluating this particular signal.

Eye contact was the nonverbal signal with the highest degree of agreement among judges (72 out of 100), likely due to its more straightforward nature compared to other signals. Unlike *emotions, hand movements,* or *smiles*, which can be enacted in a number of different ways, *eye contact* is more straightforward, primarily focusing on aspects like duration and directness. The results indicate that while nonverbal signals such as *smiling* and *displaying emotions* are important in shaping impressions of social skills, they also carry a high risk of being misjudged

or poorly executed. *Smiling* and *emotions* were the third and fourth most frequent signals to have both judges agree the signal was inappropriately executed. Additionally, while *hand movements* were only judged to be inappropriate by both judges for six participants, at least one judge found it inappropriate for 67 of the participants, highlighting the subjective nature of interpreting nonverbal cues and the need for a nuanced understanding of their use in social interactions.

**4.3.1 Insights from Judge Explanations.** *Clothing, emotions, eye contact, facial expressions, hand movements, posture,* and *smiles* all demonstrated some variation of either "too little" or "too much," both of which hurt SSI compared to the appropriate perception. For example, when *posture* was perceived as inappropriate due to being "too stiff," it corresponded with an average SSI of 3.37 (*SD* = 0.81), and when "too relaxed," the mean SSI score was 3.04 (*SD* = 0.79). Comparatively, when *posture* was perceived as appropriate, the average SSI score was 3.63 (*SD* = 0.54). This, once again, suggests there are multiple ways for signals to be perceived as inappropriate, and finding the right balance in executing signals is important to being perceived as socially skilled.

As shown in Table 6, the lowest SSI scores across the set of nonverbal signals were those signals seen by judges as odd or unusual or that made judges feel uncomfortable. For example, inappropriate *emotional displays* categorized as "made me feel uncomfortable" corresponded with a mean SSI of 2.57 (*SD* = 0.61). These response options could be summarized as signals being perceived to be "awkward." Awkwardness is commonly recognized through specific cues like poorly executed movements, misinterpreted intentions, or mismatched personal characteristics. Though hard to define explicitly, people tend to agree on their perceptions of awkwardness, as social rules and the context of the situation guide our judgment of what seems

awkward (Kadambi et al., 2020, p. 2543). These findings further highlight the critical importance of contextually and socially appropriate nonverbal behaviors in forming positive SSI.

### 4.4 Vocal Signals

Vocal signals were assessed by judges who listened to audio recordings of the interviews and then evaluated a set of five signals as appropriate or inappropriate. If inappropriate, judges were asked to indicate why they felt the signal was inappropriate from a set list of options. Individual ANOVAs for each of the five vocal signals indicated statistically significant differences across the appropriate, equivocal, and inappropriate groups. However, further post hoc Game-Howell testing showed that only *(vocal) humor* had a statistically significant difference between those in the appropriate group compared to those in the equivocal group. As was seen in the analysis of the verbal signals, the use of *(vocal) humor* was also an uncommon vocal signal, which is unsurprising given the structured interview format. Additionally, the inclusion of sex and attractiveness into ANCOVA models did not materially impact these relationships.

**4.4.1 Insights from Judge Explanations.** Excessive vocal *excitement*, despite being classified as inappropriate in some instances, was associated with notably high average SSI scores. “Too much” excitement corresponded with the highest average SSI ($M$ = 4.76, $SD$ = 0.07), albeit based on limited observation of two participants. This may be because, in interview contexts, heightened *excitement* may be perceived positively, reflecting enthusiasm or engagement, which are valued traits in social interactions (Bencharit et al., 2019). Excessive *excitement* associated with higher SSI is particularly interesting as it contrasts with the general trend seen with other signals, where perceptions of excessive behavior were often associated with lower SSI scores. The perceptions of *filler*, *pace,* and *volume* signals showed that both

excessive and insufficient use could negatively impact SSI averages. Evidence suggests that both fast and slow paces of speech influence perceptions of confidence and anxiety (Fielder & Powell, 2018; Miller et al., 2018). Similarly, *volume* being too loud can be perceived as aggressive (Anikin et al., 2023), and being too soft can appear unconfident (Jiang & Powell, 2017). These findings highlight the importance of moderation in vocal expression for effective social communication, perhaps with an exception for excitement.

### 4.5 Trends Across All Signals

Overall, the average SSI for all appropriate signals was not notably high, averaging $M$ = 3.70 ($SD$ = 0.61) on the 5-point scale used to respond to the SSI items. This moderate SSI average indicates that when merely deemed appropriate, the identified signals across verbal, nonverbal, and vocal signals are unlikely to identify individuals with exceptional SSI. However, there were several instances where the average SSI dropped below 3.00, providing evidence to support the idea that negative perceptions typically have a greater impact than neutral or positive ones (Cone & Ferguson, 2015; Van Dessel et al., 2019). In the structured setting of the interviews, participants were constrained in their ability to display behaviors typically associated with high social skills, such as the capacity to build rapport. Thus, this setting was more likely to highlight instances of poor social skills rather than exceptional ones.

Additionally, there were some cases where individuals displayed signals that were perceived as inappropriate in isolation but for which SSI scores were higher than for those who were perceived to have displayed appropriate signals. Signals perceived as inappropriate but with higher SSI scores included those related to excessive excitement, interruptions, long responses, variation in *volume,* providing too much detail, and inconsistent articulation. Taken together, these signals show a pattern that could imply that behaviors perceived as demonstrating extra

effort or excitement, even when they deviate from normative standards, are often associated with enhanced impressions of social skills in this interview context. Essentially, these “over-the-top” behaviors might be interpreted as signs of confidence, engagement, or enthusiasm, which are positively valued in many social and professional contexts, such as we see here with interviews (Bencharit et al., 2019; Stollberger et al., 2023).

When looking at the composite verbal, nonverbal, and vocal scores, nonverbal signals showed both a strong correlation with SSI *(r* = 0.46, Table 3) and represented the majority of the statistically significant signals. The importance of nonverbal outcomes aligns with prior research by Bonaccio et al. (2016), highlighting the pivotal role of nonverbal communication in professional environments. While the composite vocal score correlation with SSI was relatively strong (*r* = 0.46, Table 3), no meaningful differences were revealed in post hoc testing of pairwise comparisons across levels of appropriateness. This lack of differences across the perceived appropriateness groups may be due to the variations in the sample sizes and data distributions across these signals.

In the exploratory analysis assessing judges' reasons for deeming signals inappropriate and their impact on SSI, evidence suggests a “just right” effect, indicating that signals perceived as either excessive or lacking were typically associated with lower SSI. This trend may be attributed to observers perceiving applicants as disengaged or uninterested in the interview when they displayed “too little’” of these behaviors, which appeared unfavorable in this particular context. Alternatively, showing signals as “too much” may be perceived as anxious or awkward. It is worth noting that the study took place in a strong situational setting where more animated behavior (e.g., “too much”) might not have been attempted. Though in other contexts, these relationships might look different, what is important is the evidence that the relationship between

signals and SSI should not only be explored as linear but should also take into account these nuances in execution.

### 4.6 Limitations and Future Research

This study, as all studies do, had important limitations to consider. The controlled setting of the virtual interview, while beneficial for maintaining experimental control, certainly does not fully represent the complexity of real-world social interactions. In such a controlled environment, appropriate social responses are more prescribed, potentially limiting the range of inappropriate signals observed. The scarcity of signals perceived as inappropriate may have affected the statistical analyses. Furthermore, understanding what makes signals appropriate was beyond the scope of this study. The study's context – a brief interaction in a virtual interview setting with strangers – also restricts the scope of our findings. In real life, SSI evolves over time and across multiple interactions with a particular Actor.

Future research should aim to validate these findings in more varied and less constrained social contexts, where social norms are less defined, and Actors have greater opportunities to display a broader spectrum of behaviors. Investigating the role of context in shaping SSI is crucial, given social norms vary considerably across contexts (Chung & Rimel, 2016). For example, testing these behaviors in less structured situations, such as the initial interactions with new colleagues. Such research would contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of social skills diverse situations. The present study lays the groundwork for further exploration into these areas, serving as a pilot for more comprehensive investigations into SSI and perceptions of behaviors across different contexts and with varied raters.

A second limitation of this study is the methodological choice to separate signals into transcripts (verbal), video (nonverbal), and audio clips (vocal). Separating these communication

channels into distinct modalities was done to facilitate signal evaluations and minimize information from one modality influencing ratings of appropriateness for signals not associated with that modality. Despite instructions for judges to disregard the content of speech and the rating criteria explicitly evaluating vocal content (such as assessing volume), it was not possible to completely isolate vocal signals from the influence of verbal speech content. Separating the signals into different modalities also restricted the examination of how different signals might interact with one another. Humor, for example, may be best executed in a combination of verbal, nonverbal, and vocal signals (Gironzetti, 2017). Future studies can enhance our understanding by exploring how signals interplay within and across various modalities. Future studies could also explore scenarios limited to vocal and verbal cues, like phone conversations, or solely verbal cues, like emails, to examine which behavior perceptions become more critical.

A third limitation is the extensive number of tests conducted in our study to assess all 24 signals, which raises the possibility of encountering Type I errors. This refers to the likelihood of falsely identifying significant differences when the effect does not truly exist. Such errors are more common when multiple comparisons are made, suggesting that some of our significant results could potentially be chance findings. Caution is thus advised when interpreting these results, which should be considered exploratory.

Fourth, the widespread adoption of video conferencing platforms for work meetings has significantly increased in recent years (Evans, 2020) along with estimates of 80% of employers using virtual interviews (Indeed, 2020). Virtual meetings may give employers and colleagues a personal look into their lives due to the camera revealing their surroundings. Additionally, many people opt for virtual backgrounds. Showing surroundings and virtual backgrounds may inadvertently convey information about a participant's socioeconomic status, personal

preferences, or distractions, potentially influencing how they are perceived by colleagues and supervisors (Loignon et al., 2023). Their findings underscore the importance of considering the implications of virtual backgrounds on social dynamics and inequality in the workplace. In the context of this study, the backgrounds participants choose for their Zoom interviews may influence raters' impressions of their social skills, impacting the SSI ratings. Future studies should take backgrounds into account when capturing status-relevant information from virtual interactions.

### 4.7 Theoretical Contributions and Future Research

**4.7.1 Social Skills Impression.** This study's introduction of Social Skills Impression (SSI) makes a significant theoretical contribution to the Social Skills Framework, as put forth by Heggestad et al. (2023). While the model does link behavior to SSR through a perceptive process, this study sought to unpack the Other's perception of an Actor's behaviors (Anderson & Shirako, 2008). The importance of understanding the perception of behaviors is evidenced both by the demonstrated "just right" effect and the frequency at which judges disagreed with each other on whether or not signals were appropriate. By focusing on perceptions rather than inherent attributes, this research also aligns with broader conceptualizations of reputation (Bromley, 1993; Ferris et al., 2003; Zinko et al., 2007; Connelly & McAbee, 2023). Understanding how social SSI aligns with and shapes SSR over time will offer valuable insights into the Social Skills Framework (Heggestad et al., 2023). Ultimately, the Social Skills Framework can be used to understand the impact of SSR in the workplace, such as developing and maintaining one's social standing and increasing social capital. Additionally, investigating the notion of temporal consistency in the importance of specific behaviors, whether they are more significant in the short-term or long-term, can enhance our comprehension of the dynamics of SSI

**4.7.2 Behaviors as Signals of Social Skills.** The study's exploratory results also illuminate how specific perceptions of behaviors in virtual interviews influence SSI, thereby enhancing the Social Skills Framework (Heggestad et al., 2023). Understanding behaviors as signals is crucial, as it addresses the challenge of reducing information asymmetry about someone's social skills. This study suggests that perceptions of behaviors like providing detailed responses, exhibiting appropriate nonverbal cues, and demonstrating excitement are key signals of social skills in a virtual interview context. While these insights may be particularly relevant to virtual interviews, the focus on the appropriateness of behaviors offers a valuable approach for future SSI assessment.

Additionally, there is a need to examine how these identified behaviors translate to different contexts beyond virtual interviews. Exploring the impact of these behaviors in face-to-face interactions, informal settings, or diverse cultural contexts could provide a broader understanding of the development of SSI. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing more effective strategies in social skills training and for enhancing interpersonal interactions in various professional and social environments.

**4.7.3 Antecedents of SSI.** My analysis showed that attractiveness and sex are influential factors in SSI, corroborating existing literature that connects physical appearance to social competence (Baron et al., 2006; Langley et al., 2013; Shahani-Denning et al., 2010). My findings indicate that while sex and attractiveness do predict SSI, as demonstrated through correlations in Table 3, they do not alter the significance of specific signals when controlled for. It appears that even though attributes like attractiveness and sex influence SSI, the perceptions of specific behaviors an individual demonstrates are independently significant in the assessment of SSI. Moving forward, it is important for researchers to continue to consider sex and attractiveness in

their studies of social skills to account for their potential influence. Investigating interactions between these factors and specific signals could provide a nuanced understanding of their interplay.

Future studies should examine how specific perceptions of behaviors interact with other individual differences of both the Actors and the Other, such as personality traits and cultural influences, in shaping impressions of social skills. Just as an Actor's characteristics influence how social skills are enacted through signals (Heggestad et al., 2023), the characteristics of the receiver of those signals are likely also to have an impact on how they interpret and evaluate the Actor's behavior (Biesanz, 2010; Felfe, & Schyns, 2010). For example, how are the signals of extroverted Actors perceived by introverted Others (and vice versa)? Cultures are also important to consider, as social norms can vary widely across cultures (Morris et al., 2015). While this study has assessed social skill signals within the context of American cultural norms, future research should expand to include diverse cultures, both within and outside the USA. Understanding the nuanced ways in which these signals are executed and interpreted across different cultural backgrounds will enhance our knowledge of their effectiveness and appropriateness in a variety of social settings. This research should pay particular attention to the significant roles of vocal and nonverbal behaviors. Investigating additional behaviors in these areas might provide deeper insights.

**4.7.4 Just Right Effect.** The finding of a "'just right" effect underscores the nuanced balance required in the execution of behaviors. This effect, which suggests that signals perceived as excessive or insufficient are linked to lower SSI, underscores the importance of quality over quantity in social interactions. The "just right" effect is particularly noteworthy as it highlights the importance of quality over quantity in social interactions. Future research should approach

the analysis of behavior frequency with caution, as linear models, which assume more (or less) is better, may not accurately capture the relationships between behaviors, their effectiveness, and SSI. For instance, both too much and too little eye contact can lead to lower impressions of social skills, which a linear analysis might overlook. Future studies should consider non-linear models and methodologies that can account for the nuanced nature of these relationships. This could include exploring threshold effects or curvilinear relationships where the effectiveness of behavior changes beyond certain points. Understanding these dynamics will be important for accurately assessing SSI and for developing more effective social skills training and development programs. By moving beyond simplistic linear models, future research can provide a richer, more detailed understanding of the subtleties inherent in SSI.

Future research should explore the “just right”" effect in a variety of settings beyond the structured environment of job interviews. For instance, social interactions in informal settings or in different cultural contexts may exhibit different thresholds for what is considered “just right.” Investigating this effect in diverse scenarios, such as networking events, team meetings, or casual social gatherings, could provide insights into the adaptability and flexibility of social skills across various environments.

Moreover, the role of individual differences in viewing behaviors as being “just right” warrants exploration. Factors such as personality traits, cultural background, and previous experiences may influence how individuals interpret and engage with social signals. Research could examine how these individual differences affect the perception of what constitutes “too much” or “too little” in social behavior.

### 4.8 Conclusion

This study provides preliminary evidence of which behavioral signals enacted by an Actor influence Others' formation of impressions of social skills. Communication, emotions, eye contact, facial expressions, posture, smiles, and (vocal) humor were the most important behavioral signals for SSI in our structured virtual interview context. As expected, those who displayed more appropriate behaviors were perceived to have higher social skills, but not all signals showed differences across each level of appropriateness. While each communication channel (i.e., verbal, nonverbal, and vocal) had at least one significant signal, nonverbal behaviors appear to be the most important. Verbal cues, on the other hand, showed little difference across appropriateness levels.

This study contributes to our understanding of SSI. By examining the relationship between specific behaviors and SSI in a controlled setting, we have uncovered insights into the nuances of assessing someone as socially skilled. Results suggest that nonverbal signals play a prominent role in forming impressions of social skills. The 'just right' effect observed in my study emphasizes the importance of balanced behavioral engagement in shaping impressions of social skills. These findings have potential practical implications for training, assessment, and reducing bias in social evaluations. Additionally, they contribute to the Social Skills Framework (Heggestad et al., 2023) by unpacking some of the building blocks of Social Skills Reputation. As an exploratory study, these findings lay the groundwork for future research to build upon. By addressing these limitations and exploring new research directions, we can continue to advance our understanding of social skills, ultimately enhancing our ability to navigate social interactions effectively.

## CHAPTER 5: REFERENCES

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# TABLES

Table 1

Signals, definitions, and citations.

| Signal | Definition | Sample of Citations |
|---|---|---|
| Verbal | | |
| Affect | The expression of one's emotions or feelings through verbal content of speech | Riggio & Throckmorton, 1988; Heerey & King, 2007 |
| Articulation | This means they were able to express their thoughts through clear and coherent sentences | Rentz et al., 2002; Ferris et al., 2005 |
| Communication | Verbally demonstrating an ability to communicate information with others | Andrews & Kacmar, 2001; Bolino & Turnley, 1999 |
| Details Provided | The specificity and relevance of information included in verbal communication | Rubin & Martin, 1994 |
| Flattery | Praise, given especially to further one's own interests | Bolino & Turnley, 1999; Sibunruang et al., 2014 |
| Humor | The use of wit or jokes to lighten the interaction or convey points with levity | Bitterly et al., 2017; Robles, 2012; |
| Interruptions | Breaking into the conversation flow, which could indicate engagement or disruptiveness | Laserna et al., 2014 |
| Persuasion | Communication through reasoning or argument | Holland & Baird, 1968; Ferris et al., 2005 |
| Questions Asked | The act of inquiring for information or clarification to engage in the conversation | Robles, 2012 |
| Response Length | The amount of content in an individual's spoken answer or statement | Gifford & Wilkinson, 1985; Riggio & Throckmorton, 1988 |
| Problem-solving | The demonstration of analytical and resolution skills through verbal expression | Andrews & Kacmar, 2001; Higgins & Judge, 2004; |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Vocabulary | The range and appropriateness of words used by an individual to effectively convey their message | Robles, 2012; Rubin & Martin, 1994 |
| Nonverbal | | |
| Dress/Closing | The style and type of clothing an individual wears during an interaction | Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Robles, 2012 |
| Emotions | Brief affective reactions or experiences as shown through nonverbal displays | Riggio, 1986; Rentz et al., 2002 |
| Eye Contact | The act of looking directly into someone else's eyes during a conversation | Rubin & Martin, 1994; Higgins & Judge, 2004 |
| Facial Expressions | The movements of the facial muscles | Snyder, 1974; Gifford et al., 1985 |
| Hand Movements | The motions made with the hands | Gifford et al., 1985; R. E. Riggio & Throckmorton, 1988b |
| Posture | The positioning and alignment of the body while sitting or standing | Gifford et al., 1985; R. E. Riggio & Throckmorton, 1988b; Robles, 2012 |
| Smiles | The curving of the mouth upwards | Gifford et al., 1985; Higgins & Judge, 2004; Schneider et al., 1996 |
| Vocal | | |
| Excitement | The conveyance of enthusiasm or eagerness through tone or pitch of voice | Higgins & Judge, 2004 |
| Filler Sounds | Use of non-content words or sounds like "um," "like," during speech | Riggio & Throckmorton, 1988 |
| Humor | Vocal intonation used to express humor, including timing and tone | Yip & Martin, 2006; Bitterly et al., 2017 |
| Pace | The speed at which an individual speaks, which can affect the clarity and reception of the message | Costa & McCrae, 1999; Jiang & Pell, 2017 |
| Volume | The loudness or softness of the spoken voice, influencing the perceived assertiveness or meekness | Costa & McCrae, 1999; Jiang & Pell, 2017 |

Table 2

Interview Questions/Prompts Given to Participants

1. Tell me about a time when you had to analyze information and make a decision or recommendation. Please describe the situation in detail.

2. Tell me about a time when the ability to communicate effectively was critical to the success of a task or project.

3. Imagine the two of us are co-workers, and we have been having problems getting along. You feel that I am unnecessarily competitive, and I feel that you are misinterpreting my actions and behaviors. What would you say to me?

4. Tell me about a time when you made a mistake at work that had an impact on others' work. What did you do about it? What would you have done differently?

Table 3

Means, standard deviations, and correlations with confidence intervals.

Table 4

| Variable | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Social Skills Impression | 3.61 | 0.65 | | | | | | | |
| 2. Global Social Skills Impression | 3.82 | 0.87 | .91** [.87, .94] | | | | | | |
| 3. Interview Experience | 12.41 | 24.26 | .14 [-.06, .34] | .13 [-.07, .32] | | | | | |
| 4. Sex | 0.33 | 0.53 | -.22* [-.40, -.02] | -.23* [-.41, -.03] | .03 [-.17, .23] | | | | |
| 5. Attractiveness | 4.98 | 1.04 | .25* [.05, .42] | .29** [.10, .46] | -.01 [-.21, .19] | -.21* [-.39, -.01] | | | |
| 6. Verbal Composite | 0.24 | 0.17 | .23* [.04, .41] | .19 [-.01, .37] | -.07 [-.26, .13] | -.05 [-.25, .15] | .18 [-.02, .37] | | |
| 7. Nonverbal Composite | 0.39 | 0.20 | .46** [.30, .61] | .46** [.29, .60] | .06 [-.14, .26] | -.27** [-.45, -.07] | .29** [.10, .46] | .23* [.04, .41] | |
| 8. Vocal Composite | 0.21 | 0.18 | .46** [.29, .60] | .48** [.31, .62] | .10 [-.10, .29] | -.14 [-.33, .06] | .22* [.02, .40] | .39** [.21, .54] | .34** [.16, .51] |

Note. M and SD are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Females are coded 0. For composite scores, 1 is appropriate, .5 is equivocal, and 0 is inappropriate. Interview experiences represented the number of self-reported employment interviews the participant has participated in. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval for each correlation. The confidence interval is a plausible range of population correlations that could have caused the sample correlation (Cumming, 2014). * Indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$.

Table 4

Regression Results Using Social Skills Impression as the Criterion.

| Predictor | b | b 95% CI [LL, UL] | beta | beta 95% CI [LL, UL] | $sr^2$ | $sr^2$ 95% CI [LL, UL] | *r* | Fit | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Intercept) | 3.04** | [2.39, 3.68] | | | | | | | |
| Sex | -0.22 | [-0.46, 0.02] | -0.18 | [-0.38, 0.01] | .03 | [-.03, .10] | -.23* | | |
| Attractiveness | 0.13* | [0.01, 0.25] | 0.21 | [0.01, 0.41] | .04 | [-.03, .12] | .25* | | |
| | | | | | | | | $R^2$ = .093** 95% CI [.01,.20] | |
| (Intercept) | 1.89** | [1.13, 2.64] | | | | | | | |
| Sex | -0.13 | [-0.35, 0.08] | -0.11 | [-0.28, 0.07] | .01 | [-.02, .04] | -.23* | | |
| Attractiveness | 0.04 | [-0.07, 0.15] | 0.06 | [-0.11, 0.24] | .00 | [-.02, .02] | .25* | | |
| Verbal Composite | 0.02 | [-0.71, 0.74] | 0.00 | [-0.18, 0.19] | .00 | [-.00, .00] | .23* | | |
| Nonverbal Composite | 1.00** | [0.39, 1.61] | 0.30 | [0.12, 0.49] | .07 | [-.01, .16] | .46** | | |
| Vocal Composite | 1.21** | [0.52, 1.90] | 0.33 | [0.14, 0.52] | .08 | [-.01, .18] | .46** | | |
| | | | | | | | | $R^2$ = .336** 95% CI [.16,.44] | $\Delta R^2$ = .243** 95% CI [.10, .38] |

Note. Females are coded 0. For composite scores, 1 is appropriate, .5 is equivocal, and 0 is inappropriate. A significant b-weight indicates the beta-weight and semi-partial correlation are also significant. b represents unstandardized regression weights. beta indicates the standardized regression weights. $sr^2$ represents the semi-partial correlation squared. r represents the zero-order correlation. LL and UL indicate the lower and upper limits of a confidence interval, respectively.
* indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$.

Table 5

Composite Social Skills Impression Scores by Level of Appropriateness.

| | Appropriate | | Equivocal Rating | | Inappropriate | | One-Way ANOVA | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SSI *M (SD)* | Participant Frequency | SSI *M (SD)* | Participant Frequency | SSI *M (SD)* | Participant Frequency | *F* | *p* | *df* |
| Verbal | | | | | | | | | |
| Affect | 3.73 (0.60) | 75 | 3.39 (0.64) | 22 | 2.46 (0.49) | 3 | 8.27 | 0.00 | 2 |
| Articulation | 3.59 (0.65) | 43 | 3.7 (0.68) | 45 | 3.41 (0.55) | 12 | 0.97 | 0.38 | 2 |
| Communication* | 3.75 (0.54) | 43 | 3.74 (0.68) | 40 | 3.26 (0.62) | 17 | 3.50 | 0.03 | 2 |
| Details Provided | 3.71 (0.68) | 46 | 3.69 (0.54) | 26 | 3.38 (0.66) | 28 | 2.55 | 0.08 | 2 |
| Flattery | 3.76 (0.49) | 18 | 3.59 (0.68) | 81 | 3.05 | 1 | 0.86 | 0.42 | 2 |
| Humor | 3.61 (0.65) | 99 | 4.48 | 1 | NA | NA | 1.78 | 0.18 | 1 |
| Interruptions | 3.60 (0.60) | 88 | 3.65 (1.10) | 8 | 3.88 (0.73) | 4 | 0.37 | 0.69 | 2 |
| Persuasion | 3.65 (0.63) | 71 | 3.58 (0.68) | 26 | 2.92 (0.71) | 3 | 1.90 | 0.15 | 2 |
| Questions Asked | 3.61 (0.60) | 81 | 3.55 (0.89) | 14 | 4.81 | 1 | 1.78 | 0.17 | 2 |
| Response Length | 3.67 (0.66) | 58 | 3.72 (0.48) | 16 | 3.41 (0.71) | 25 | 1.69 | 0.19 | 2 |
| Problem Solving | 3.75 (0.49) | 48 | 3.67 (0.80) | 30 | 3.37 (0.67) | 12 | 1.66 | 0.20 | 2 |
| Vocabulary Used | 3.68 (0.66) | 60 | 3.53 (0.66) | 35 | 3.54 (0.33) | 4 | 0.61 | 0.55 | 2 |
| Nonverbal | | | | | | | | | |
| Dress/Clothing | 3.71 (0.64) | 62 | 3.54 (0.64) | 29 | 3.21 (0.63) | 9 | 2.73 | 0.07 | 2 |
| Emotions* | 3.99 (0.72) | 16 | 3.62 (0.53) | 65 | 3.29 (0.81) | 19 | 5.62 | 0.00 | 2 |
| Eye Contact* | 3.78 (0.57) | 59 | 3.46 (0.76) | 27 | 3.21 (0.55) | 13 | 5.61 | 0.00 | 2 |
| Facial Expressions*~ | 4.02 (0.64) | 22 | 3.58 (0.56) | 62 | 3.20 (0.73) | 15 | 8.48 | 0.00 | 2 |
| Hand Movements | 3.68 (0.63) | 27 | 3.62 (0.65) | 67 | 3.22 (0.68) | 6 | 1.22 | 0.30 | 2 |
| Posture* | 3.75 (0.54) | 51 | 3.63 (0.59) | 32 | 3.14 (0.89) | 16 | 5.79 | 0.00 | 2 |
| Smiles* | 3.94 (0.66) | 21 | 3.61 (0.56) | 55 | 3.34 (0.72) | 24 | 5.20 | 0.01 | 2 |
| Vocal | | | | | | | | | |
| Excitement | 3.72 (0.60) | 76 | 3.31 (0.79) | 17 | 3.25 (0.57) | 7 | 4.04 | 0.02 | 2 |
| Filler Sounds | 3.76 (0.59) | 45 | 3.57 (0.66) | 42 | 3.25 (0.73) | 12 | 3.12 | 0.05 | 2 |
| Humor*~^ | 3.75 (0.56) | 78 | 3.19 (0.75) | 21 | 2.29 | 1 | 9.69 | 0.00 | 2 |
| Pace | 3.72 (0.63) | 51 | 3.61 (0.61) | 35 | 3.22 (0.72) | 14 | 3.42 | 0.04 | 2 |
| Volume | 3.70 (0.63) | 75 | 3.40 (0.63) | 20 | 2.88 (0.72) | 4 | 4.61 | 0.01 | 2 |

Table 6

Selected Reasons Signal was Perceived as Inappropriate and Corresponding Social Skills Impression (SSI) Scores

| | Signal | Reason | SSI *Mean* | SSI *SD* | Judge Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Verbal | Affect | Pessimistic in responses | 3.03 | 0.74 | 15 |
| | | Use of negative words (e.g., bad, worst, hard, etc..) | 3.24 | 0.65 | 16 |
| | Articulation | Rambling | 3.63 | 0.69 | 30 |
| | | Unclear to understand or follow | 3.63 | 0.63 | 46 |
| | | Jumped around in sentences or story | 3.64 | 0.54 | 29 |
| | | Too brief | 3.39 | 0.64 | 16 |
| | | Sometimes well done, others not | 3.74 | 0.61 | 13 |
| | Communication | Demonstrated poor communication skills | 3.23 | 0.74 | 30 |
| | | Attempted to demonstrate, but not enough information to determine ability | 3.61 | 0.62 | 41 |
| | Details Provided | Not enough detail | 3.39 | 0.69 | 60 |
| | | Too much detail | 3.82 | 0.35 | 17 |
| | | Made you feel uncomfortable | 3.41 | 0.95 | 9 |
| | Humor | Not enough | 4.48 | | 1 |
| | Interruptions | At inappropriate times | 3.08 | 1.14 | 3 |
| | | Felt rude | 3.91 | 0.77 | 7 |
| | | Unnecessary | 3.82 | 1.03 | 11 |
| | Persuasion | Too little | 3.36 | 0.67 | 22 |
| | Questions Asked | Interrupted interviewer | 3.83 | 1.10 | 5 |
| | | Question not relevant | 3.48 | 1.11 | 7 |
| | Response Length | Mostly too brief | 3.32 | 0.67 | 32 |
| | | Mostly too long | 3.87 | 0.32 | 9 |
| | | Sometimes too brief | 3.40 | 0.78 | 18 |
| | | Sometimes too long | 3.71 | 0.67 | 8 |
| | Problem Solving | Demonstrated poor problem solving ability | 3.17 | 0.90 | 15 |
| | | Attempted to demonstrate, but not enough information to determine ability | 3.50 | 0.72 | 40 |
| | Vocabulary Used | Too informal | 3.52 | 0.66 | 35 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Too formal | 3.49 | 0.27 | 6 |
| | | Used words incorrectly | 3.55 | 0.37 | 4 |
| Nonverbal | Dress/Clothing | Too casual | 3.38 | 0.65 | 43 |
| | Emotions | Too little (range of emotions) | 3.67 | 0.63 | 56 |
| | | Too dull | 3.34 | 0.62 | 60 |
| | | Made me feel uncomfortable | 2.57 | 0.61 | 3 |
| | Eye Contact | Too little | 3.36 | 0.59 | 47 |
| | | Too much | 3.47 | 0.82 | 6 |
| | Facial Expressions | Too little | 3.49 | 0.59 | 89 |
| | | Unusual/Made me feel uncomfortable | 2.72 | 0.77 | 5 |
| | Hand Movements | Too much | 3.59 | 0.60 | 11 |
| | | Odd or unusual | 2.96 | 0.83 | 9 |
| | | Fidgety | 3.33 | 0.79 | 6 |
| | Posture | Too relaxed | 3.04 | 0.79 | 22 |
| | | Too stiff | 3.37 | 0.81 | 6 |
| | | Too close to screen | 3.52 | 0.70 | 33 |
| | | Too far away from screen | 3.26 | 1.04 | 4 |
| | | Fidgety | 3.37 | 1.03 | 12 |
| | Smiles | Too much | 3.76 | | 1 |
| | | Too little | 3.52 | 0.63 | 97 |
| | | Made me feel uncomfortable | 2.63 | 0.75 | 4 |
| Vocal | Excitement | Too much | 4.76 | 0.07 | 2 |
| | | Too little | 3.22 | 0.57 | 28 |
| | | Inappropriate at times | 2.29 | 0.00 | 1 |
| | Filler Sounds | Too many | 3.45 | 0.68 | 62 |
| | | Not enough | 4.14 | | 1 |
| | | Distracting | 3.36 | 0.69 | 35 |
| | Humor | Ineffective delivery | 3.10 | 0.79 | 12 |
| | | At inappropriate times | 3.11 | 0.57 | 10 |
| | Pace | Too fast | 3.66 | 0.60 | 25 |
| | | Too slow | 3.15 | 0.48 | 13 |
| | | Too much variation/frequent change | 3.39 | 0.73 | 30 |
| | Volume | Too loud | 1.90 | | 1 |
| | | Too soft | 3.27 | 0.62 | 26 |
| | | Too much variation | 3.86 | 0.15 | 4 |

**FIGURE**

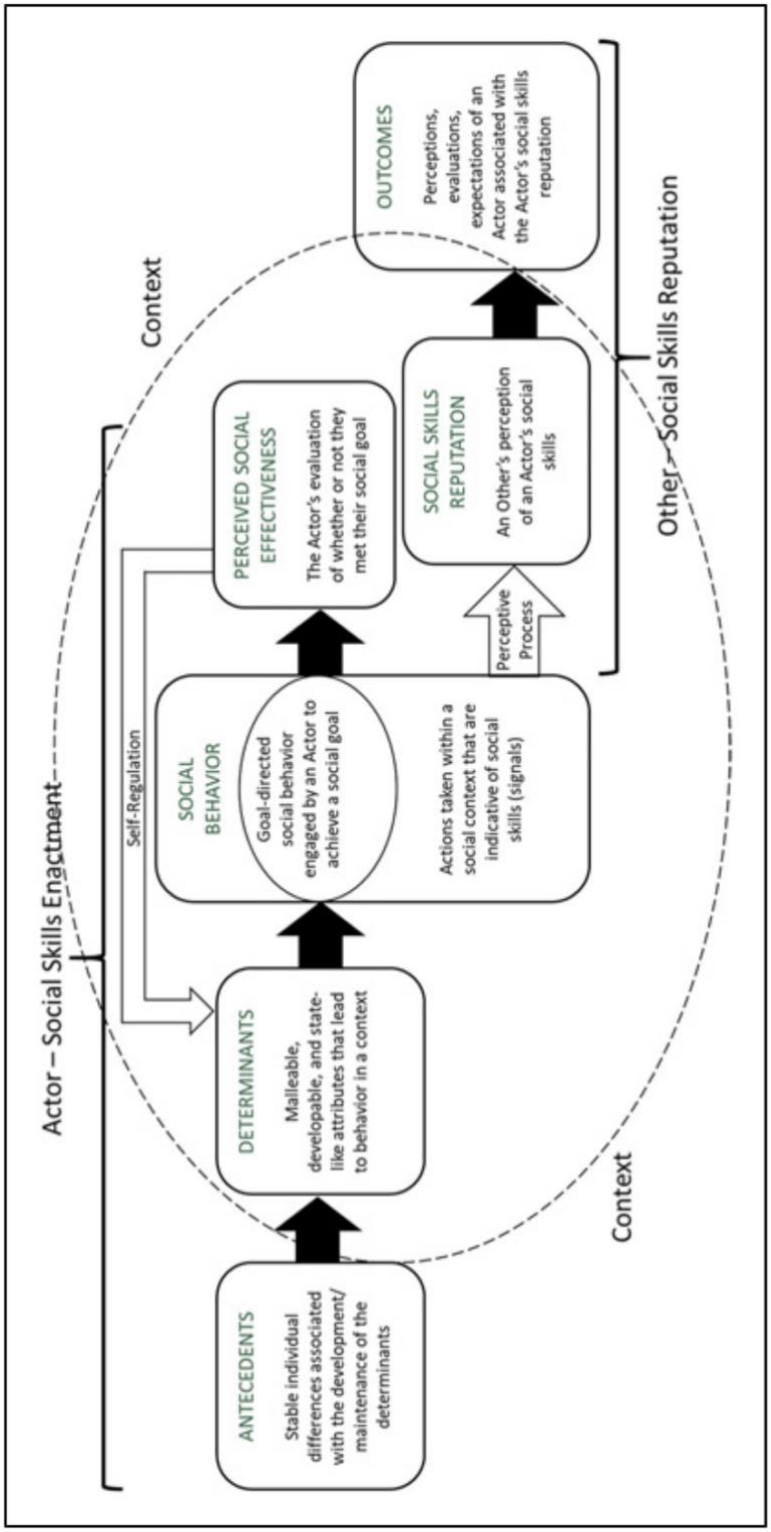


**Figure 1.** Social Skills Framework.

## APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

*The following is the email being used to recruit participants:*

Subject: Practice Online Interviewing and Earn a $15 Amazon Gift Card

Do you want online interview experience? Do you want to earn $15 to practice your interviewing skills?]Our lab is looking for students and staff that want to practice their interviewing skills to help with a research study.

Online interviews are becoming increasingly more relevant due to the current times. This study offers an opportunity to gain experience with online interviews.
This study will take place in two virtual sessions, requiring about 2 hours total of your time. For the first session, you will complete a 60-minute online pre-interview questionnaire that will ask questions about your personality, thoughts, feelings, social skills and job interview experience.

Approximately 2 days after the first session, in a separate 60-minute Zoom session, you will participate in a mock job interview and complete additional survey questions before and after the interview. The mock job interview will be video recorded.

At the end of the study, you will receive a $15 Amazon gift card for your participation.
If you are interested in participating, please fill out this quick pre-screening survey:
http://uncc.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0kTZBYxJd9T9y6N
This will determine if you are eligible to participate. Slots will be filled on a first come, first-serve basis. Please feel free to share this opportunity with other UNC Charlotte students.
If you are eligible to participate, a member of our research team will email you to schedule your interview.

Sincerely,
Austin Valvo
Doctoral Student | Organizational Science
University of North Carolina at Charlotte | Colvard 3074

Nicole Voss
Doctoral Student | Organizational Science
University of North Carolina at Charlotte | Colvard 3074

Amy Canevello
Associate Professor
University of North Carolina, Charlotte
Department of Psychological Science
Organizational Science PhD Program
Health Psychology PhD Program
acanevel@uncc.edu

This study has been approved by the UNC Charlotte IRB (IRBIS-21-0138

## APPENDIX B: ADAPTED SOCIAL SKILLS INVENTORY

Original and adapted items from the Social Skills Inventory (Ferris, Witt, & Hochwarter, 2001)

Each item from both scales were rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree).

| | Original: Self-Rating | Adapted: Observer-Rating |
|---|---|---|
| | Instructions: In general, please rate how well the following describes you. | Instructions: During the interview, what were your perceptions of the participant? |
| 1. | I find it easy to put myself in the position of others | I feel that it is easy for the participants to put themselves in the position of others |
| 2. | I am keenly aware of how I am perceived by others | I feel the participant is keenly aware of how they are perceived by others |
| 3. | In social situations, it is always clear to me exactly what to say and do | I feel that it is always clear to the participant exactly what to say and do in social situations |
| 4. | I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others | I feel that the participant is good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others |
| 5. | I am good at making myself visible with influential people in my organization | I feel that the participant is good at making themselves visible with influential people in their organization |
| 6. | I am good at reading others' body language | I feel the participant appears to be good at reading others' body language |
| 7. | I am able to adjust my behavior and become the type of person dictated by any situation | I feel that the participants is able to adjust their behavior and become the type of person dictated by any situation |

## APPENDIX C: MEASURE OF SIGNALS

Verbal Signals

Instructions: Think about the applicant's words throughout the entire interaction. What are your reactions? We are looking for your own opinion or feelings. There is no standard for "appropriateness" other than your own.

| Do you agree with the below statements? | | If NO- Why? Select all that apply |
|---|---|---|
| 1. The applicant's vocabulary use was appropriate for the situation. | Yes/No | Too informal (used slang)<br>Too informal (used too big of words)<br>Used words incorrectly |
| 2. The applicant was able to articulate their ideas clearly.<br>This means they were able to express their thoughts through clear and coherent sentences. | Yes/No | Rambling<br>Unclear to understand or follow<br>Jumped around in sentences or story<br>Too brief<br>Sometimes well done, others not |
| 3. The applicant's responses to the questions were appropriate in length. | Yes/No | Mostly too brief<br>Mostly too long<br>Sometimes too brief<br>Sometimes too long |
| 4. The applicant's affect was appropriate for the interview? | Yes/No | |
| 5. How would you describe the applicant's affect? | Negative<br>Neutral<br>Positive | If negative or neutral, why?<br>Spoke negatively of others<br>Pessimistic in responses<br>Use of negative words (e.g., negative words such as bad, worst, hard, etc..)<br>Neutral affect |
| 6. The applicant's responses had an appropriate amount of detail. | Yes/No | Not enough detail<br>Too much detail |

Instructions: Consider the content of the applicant's responses. This could include what they say in stories or examples provided to the interviewer.

| | | If NO- Was it..? Select all that apply |
|---|---|---|
| 1. The use of flattery was appropriate and effective.<br>Examples include complimenting the interviewer or someone else during a story, praising someone when describing a past | Yes/No/NA | Too much<br>Not enough<br>Made you feel uncomfortable<br>At inappropriate times |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | interaction, or telling a story about doing something kind for others. | | |
| 2. | Effectively demonstrated ability to problem solve. | Yes/No/NA | Demonstrated poor problem-solving ability<br>Attempted to demonstrate, but not enough information to determine ability<br>Ineffective in demonstrating ability |
| 3. | Effectively demonstrated their ability to communicate with others.<br>Examples include telling a story about a time they communicated well with others, giving specific examples of using communication to clear up a misperception, etc. | Yes/No/NA | Demonstrated poor communication skills<br>Attempted to demonstrate, but not enough information to determine ability |
| 4. | Effective in the use persuasion.<br>Examples include saying things meant to influence the interviewer or telling a story that was meant to convince the interviewer of a skill or ability. | Yes/No/NA | Too much<br>Too little<br>At inappropriate times<br>Responses felt ingenuine<br>Responses felt manipulative |
| 5. | Attempts to use humor were effective. | Yes/No/NA | Too much<br>Not enough<br>Inappropriate times<br>Inappropriate content |
| 6. | Asked appropriate questions. | Yes/No/NA | Interrupted interviewer<br>Question not relevant<br>Not a good question (obvious answer)<br>Not a good question (other)<br>Question shows lack of interest in interview |
| 7. | The participant only interrupted when appropriate. | Yes/No/NA | At inappropriate times<br>Felt rude<br>Unnecessary |

Nonverbal Signals

Instructions: Think about the applicant's behavior throughout the entire interaction. What are your reactions? We are looking for your own opinion or feelings. There is no standard for "appropriateness" other than your own.

| Considering the following from watching the applicant. | Was it appropriate? | If NO, why? select all that apply |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Dress/clothing: Was it appropriate? | Yes/No | Too casual<br>Too formal |
| 2. Eye contact: Was it appropriate? | Yes/No | Too much<br>Too little |
| 3. Hand movements: Was it appropriate? | Yes/No | Too much<br>Too little<br>Odd or unusual<br>Fidgety<br>Made me feel uncomfortable |
| 4. Posture: Was it appropriate? (i.e., position in which they held their body when sitting) | Yes/No | Too relaxed<br>Too stiff<br>Too close to screen<br>Too far away from screen<br>Fidgety |
| 5. Facial expressions: Was it appropriate? | Yes/No | Too much<br>Too little<br>Unusual / Made me feel uncomfortable |
| 6. Smile: Was it appropriate? | Yes/No | Too much<br>Too little<br>Made me feel uncomfortable |
| 7. Emotions displayed: Was it appropriate? | Yes/No | Too much<br>Too little<br>Too positive<br>Too dull<br>Made me feel uncomfortable |

Vocal Signals

Instructions: Think about the applicant's vocal sounds throughout the entire interaction. What are your reactions? We are looking for your own opinion or feelings. Don't focus on the content of their speech, but their vocal sounds. There is no standard for "appropriateness" other than your own.

| Considering the following from listening to the applicant. | Was it appropriate? | If NO, why? select all that apply |
|---|---|---|
| 1. The amount of excitement in their voice | Yes/No | Too much<br>Too little<br>Inappropriate at times |
| 2. Pace to their speech: Was it appropriate? | Yes/No | Too fast<br>Too slow<br>Too much variation/frequent changes |
| 3. The volume of their voice: Was it appropriate? | Yes/No | Too loud<br>Too soft<br>Too much variation |
| 4. Use of humor: Was it appropriate? Focus on the inflections, pace, pauses, and other vocal features for the execution of the humor, not the content. | Yes/No/NA | Ineffective delivery<br>Too much<br>Not enough<br>At inappropriate times<br>Inappropriate type<br>Too serious |
| 5. Use of filler words: Was it appropriate? This includes sounds such as "uh," "uhm," "like," etc. | Yes/No | Too many<br>Not enough<br>At the wrong time<br>Distracting |

## APPENDIX D: TECHNOLOGY CHECK MEASURE

| | Very poor | Poor | Neutral | Good | Excellent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Please rate the overall quality of the video during the interview. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Please rate the overall quality of the audio during the interview. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Did you experience any technical interruptions during the interview? | No | Yes<br>If yes, please Explain: | | | |