

‘Slip Out the Back Jack’: Why Applicants Ghost Potential Employers

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This study examined predictors of ‘ghosting’, an extreme form of applicant withdrawal in which applicants fail to appear for scheduled interviews and completely cease all communication. These predictors included frequency of recruiter communication, knowledge of the company, gender, conscientiousness, and helicopter parenting. All predictors were found to significantly predict ghosting such that frequency of recruiter communication and candidates’ knowledge about the firm influenced the level of attraction that candidates feel toward an organization which, in turn, influenced their likelihood to ghost an organization. Conscientiousness, gender and helicopter parenting also related to ghosting. Practical implications and future research directions are discussed.

Keywords: ghosting, recruitment, applicant withdrawal

INTRODUCTION

“Crystal Romans, a recruiter in North Carolina, set up a face-to-face interview with a job candidate for a position at a large bank. She confirmed the time, 8:30 a.m., the night before and had a colleague stationed to walk the candidate into the room. When morning came, the candidate never showed. Panicked, Ms. Romans sent text messages. She called. She left the applicant a voice mail. Silence.”

--Cutter (2018)

The term "ghosting" has been used in the dating literature (e.g., Freedman et al., 2019; LeFebvre et al., 2019) to describe a relationship dissolution process in which one member of the couple ends the relationship by simply disappearing (like a ghost) - - no phone call, no text message, no social media posts, nothing but silence. As described in the scenario above, this phenomenon is now occurring in the workplace as well. A recent survey by job search engine Indeed found that 83 percent of the 900 employers polled had been ghosted by a job candidate who either did not show up for an interview or stopped replying to hiring

managers (Lewis, 2019). According to Will Staney, the founder of Proactive Talent, a Texas-based recruiting and consulting firm, casinos and restaurants are experiencing ghosting rates as high as 50 percent (Maurer, 2019). As a result, some recruiters overbook interviews, knowing that probably half of the appointments may not show up. While ghosting is clearly a frustration for recruiters, it does not appear that job applicants have the same view. For example, a recent survey by Clutch, a B2B ratings and reviews company, reported that more than 40 percent of job seekers indicate that they think it is reasonable to ghost companies during the interview process (Driscoll, 2018).

Ghosting by job applicants is essentially a form of applicant withdrawal as individuals are removing themselves from the recruitment process. Some studies of applicant withdrawal have examined why applicants fail to appear for selection testing (e.g., Baskin et al., 2014; Ployhart et al., 2002; Ryan et al., 2000; Schmit & Ryan, 1997), while other studies have focused on applicant withdrawal in all phases of the recruitment process. Findings show that a number of factors increase the likelihood of applicant withdrawal including time delays (Arvey et al., 1975), negative perceptions of the company, lower job commitment, less family support for the job choice, requirement to relocate (Ryan et al., 2000), low self-identification with the organization (Griepentrog et al., 2012), and positive perceptions of available employment alternatives (Acikgoz & Sumer, 2018).

What is unique about ghosting is that it is an extreme form of applicant withdrawal, in which applicants fail to communicate their withdrawal and vanish from the process. In addition, employers surveyed in the Indeed study reported that ghosting is a recent phenomenon, with 69 percent reporting it started within the last two years (Lewis, 2019). Traditionally, norms of courtesy and professionalism have prevailed whereby candidates would notify the potential employer if they could not attend the interview or had accepted another job offer. Since fewer candidates are choosing to follow this protocol, understanding what influences applicants to abruptly cease all communication could help organizations manage their recruitment process more effectively. To date, there is no evidence in the academic literature of efforts to examine ghosting in the workplace. However, practitioner research shows that one of the reasons given by respondents for ghosting a potential employer was that the company had stopped communicating with them (Delgado, 2018); further, research findings on ghosting in the dating literature (e.g., LeFebvre et al., 2019; Freedman et al., 2019) will be used to guide our discussion. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine predictors of ghosting during the recruitment process.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

One theoretical framework that is relevant to understanding applicant withdrawal from the recruitment process and determining predictors for ghosting is signaling theory (Connelly et al., 2011; Rynes, 1991; Ryan et al., 2000; Rynes et al., 1991). According to signaling theory, when one party has more or better information than the other party, individuals will try to reduce that information asymmetry (Spence, 1973). For example, job applicants may try to reduce information asymmetry for employers by “signaling” their rigorous higher education, hoping that employers will assume that higher education levels are correlated with higher productivity. Likewise, characteristics of the recruitment process or the recruiter can serve as “signals” for unobservable organizational characteristics to job candidates.

In their review of signaling theory, Connelly et al. (2011) distinguish between intentional and unintentional signals. Firms may ignorantly and unconsciously send negative signals as an unintended consequence of the firm representative’s action (Connelly et al., 2011; Krausert, 2016). For example, applicants may interpret recruiter communication that is consistent, keeps them informed, and tries to incorporate two-way exchanges as signaling the company’s interest in them as an employee. Conversely, applicants may interpret recruiter communication that is non-existent as signaling the company’s lack of interest in them. According to McIntyre et al. (1980), “the response time may be taken by candidates as information about a company’s interest in them when it was not intended as a signal by a company” (p. 748). This leads us to the following hypothesis:

H1: Recruiter communication will be positively related to candidates’ perceptions of the company’s interest in them.

Not only are candidates more likely to use recruiter communication as a signal to gauge how interested a company is in them; they may also view it as a signal of how managers communicate with employees in the company and this, in turn, is likely to affect how attracted they are to the company. For example, research shows job candidates are more likely to be attracted to companies whose recruiters demonstrate certain behaviors such as being personable (i.e., thoughtful, likeable, and respectful; Allen et al., 2004; Harris & Fink, 1987; Walker et al., 2013), competence (i.e., willingness to answer and ask relevant questions; Harris & Fink, 1987), and informativeness (i.e., the more accurate information he/she has; Allen et al., 2004; Ryan et al., 2005; Rynes, 1991; Turban et al., 1995). In addition, candidates are more attracted to an organization when applicants perceive that the recruitment process involves just, fair, and considerate treatment, affords them timely responses, and is consistent across candidates (Chapman et al., 2005). Other research has demonstrated that lack of follow-up, slowness, and delays in getting back to applicants are related to lower expectations of receiving a job offer, less attraction to the organization and a negative effect on job choice decisions (Boswell et al., 2003; Breaugh, 1992; Chapman et al., 2005; Saks & Uggerslev, 2010). Thus, this leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: Recruiter communication will be positively related to candidates' attraction to the company.

In their job search process, job candidates may attempt to reduce uncertainty by gathering additional information about the firms to which they have applied. For some of this information (e.g., word of mouth), firms do not necessarily control its flow, its message, or its timing, yet this information is likely to affect candidate perceptions of an organization and how attracted they are to that specific organization. Thus, we suggest that another relevant theoretical framework for describing recruitment situations is uncertainty reduction theory (URT) (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Walker et al., 2013) which has been used primarily in the interpersonal relationship formation literature. Berger and Calabrese (1975) argue that uncertainty must be reduced during initial stages of interaction if a relationship is to progress. As the individuals in the relationship learn more about each other, they either make plans for future interactions or terminate the relationship, depending on whether the information they acquire is interpreted as positive or negative (Sunnafrank, 1990). URT is relevant to recruitment as applicants are attempting to establish an employment relationship and unfavorable knowledge may affect how attracted they are to the organization. Thus, we have the following hypothesis:

H3: Unfavorable knowledge of the company will be negatively related to the candidates' attraction to the company.

While empirical evidence on ghosting in the dating literature is scarce (Navarro et al., 2020), the existing research suggests that many individuals decide to ghost when they do not want to have a difficult or awkward conversation with the other party (LeFebvre et al., 2019). This literature also suggests that individuals' perceptions about the future of the relationship matter (which, again, is consistent with URT). Those individuals with destiny beliefs or fixed mindsets (i.e., believing relationships will either work or they will not) are more positive toward ghosting, have higher ghosting intentions, and have previously ghosted others, whereas those with growth beliefs or growth mindsets (i.e., believing relationships will grow over time) are more negative towards ghosting, have lower ghosting intentions, and have not ghosted others (Freedman et al., 2019). In the same vein, we argue that candidates who perceive there is a high likelihood that the job would come to fruition (i.e., the firm is interested in them), will be less likely to ghost (and vice versa). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Candidates' perceptions of the company's interest in them will be negatively related to ghosting.

Qualitative research on ghosting in the dating literature suggests attraction is a critical component (LeFebvre et al., 2019). Individuals who ghost have lost interest, stopped investing, and/or experienced boredom with the relationship. Again, for these individuals, avoidance (especially using technological

outlets) appeared to be the easiest exit. When applying this behavior to the recruitment process, we argue that if candidates are attracted to the company, they will be less likely to ghost. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis, as well as several mediation hypotheses:

H5: *Candidates' attraction to the company will be negatively related to ghosting.*

H6: *Candidates' perceptions of the company's interest in them will mediate the relationship between recruiter communication and ghosting.*

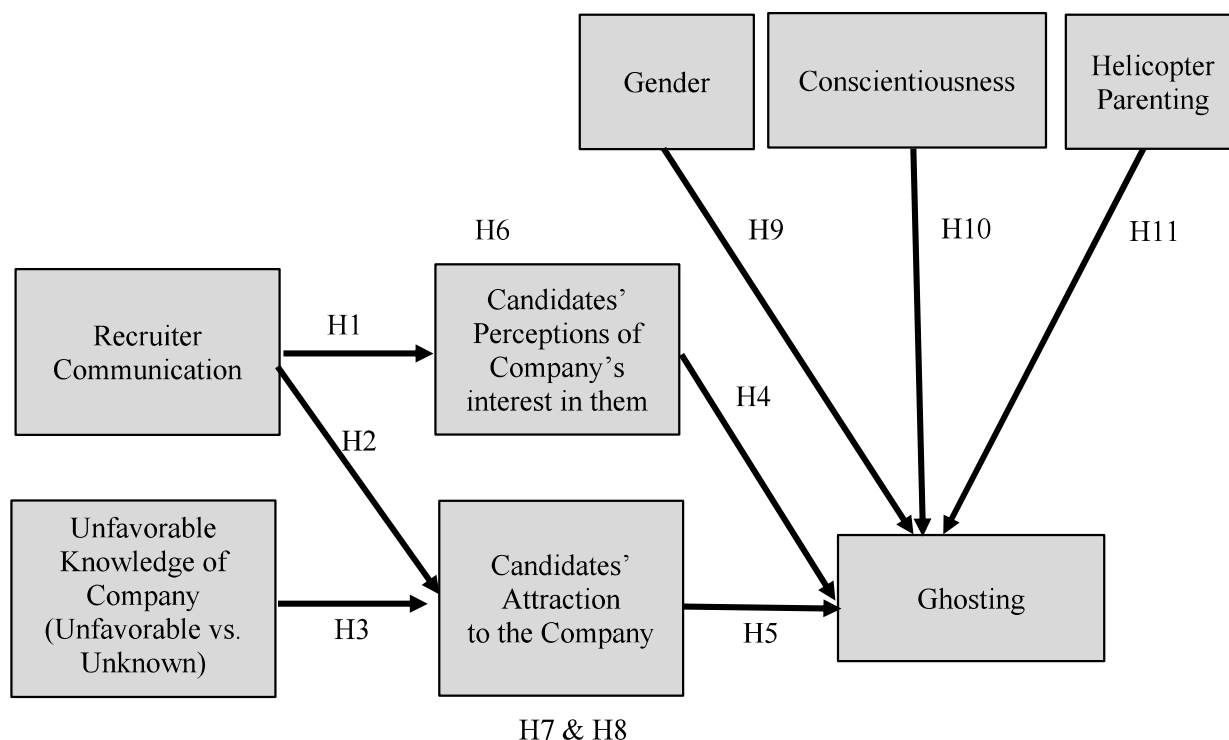
H7: *Candidates' attraction to the company will mediate the relationship between recruiter communication and ghosting.*

H8: *Candidates' attraction to the company will mediate the relationship between unfavorable knowledge of the company and ghosting.*

Individual Differences

In addition to the predictors suggested by theories described above, we examined three other individual differences to extend knowledge of applicant characteristics that may influence ghosting behavior, namely gender, conscientiousness, and helicopter parenting. See Figure 1.

FIGURE 1
HYPOTHESIZED THEORETICAL MODEL OF THE PREDICTORS OF JOB CANDIDATE GHOSTING BEHAVIOR



Gender

Social role theory asserts that dispositional and behavioral differences between men and women are the result of social roles ascribed to men and women in the socialization process (Eagly, 1987; 2009; Eagly et al., 2000). That is, society holds different normative expectations for men and women such that women are

expected to be communal (e.g., friendly, unselfish, interpersonally sensitive, emotionally expressive), whereas men are expected to be agentic (i.e., assertive, competitive, controlling, independent). Over time, men and women tend to internalize these normative expectations and exhibit traits or behaviors consistent with these expectations. It follows then that, because women tend to focus on interpersonal relationships more than men, we believe that they would be less likely to ghost a potential employer. Therefore, we predict:

H9: Men will have a greater tendency to ghost an employer than women.

Conscientiousness

According to the Big-Five model of personality, conscientiousness is the tendency for an individual to be achievement-oriented, organized, and dependable (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Due to a high level of self-discipline and a tendency toward planned, as opposed to spontaneous, behavior, it is likely that job applicants who are higher in conscientiousness will be likely to follow through with their initial intentions of participating in a job interview. In support, Schmit and Ryan (1997) found that some of the reasons given for withdrawal from the recruitment process were that they overslept, were late for the exam, or felt that the test was scheduled too early in the morning. Research by Ployhart et al. (2002) had similar findings, with applicants indicating that they overslept, forgot that they needed to go to testing, or lost their registration card. Overall, these reasons for withdrawal behavior demonstrate a low level of conscientiousness or lack of self-discipline. This is supported by Acikgoz and Sumer (2018) who found a small, but significant, relationship between conscientiousness and applicant withdrawal. Thus, we argue that candidates with a high level of conscientiousness will be less likely to ghost a potential employer. Accordingly, the following is hypothesized:

H10: Conscientiousness will be negatively related to ghosting.

Helicopter Parenting

“Helicopter parents” are those who tend to hover over their child and get involved in any problem that their child might encounter (Cline & Fay, 1990). Over the past decade, parents who display this type of behavior have been playing a prominent role in their child’s job search process. For example, Gardner (2007) surveyed 725 employers and found that parents of young adult applicants had: submitted a resume on behalf of their child (31%), promoted their son or daughter for a position (26%), and complained to a company if it did not hire their son or daughter (15%), attempted to negotiate salary and benefits (9%), and attended the interview (4%). While a few helicopter parenting studies have appeared in the management literature (e.g. Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2014; Gomes & Deuling, 2019; Insch, Heames, & McIntyre, 2010; Karl & Peluchette, 2016; Karl et al., 2018), only one has examined the effect of helicopter parenting on the job search process. Bradley-Geist and Olson-Buchanan (2014) provided 482 undergraduate students with four workplace scenarios that involved meeting deadlines, job seeking behaviors, and handling work commitments. Students were then given several options regarding how likely they would be to respond. Maladaptive responses included lying, blaming others, getting someone else to take care of the problem for them, or ignoring or avoiding the problem. Their findings showed that helicopter parenting was significantly related to these maladaptive responses.

Given the small number of studies on helicopter parenting in work contexts, we also consulted the education literature. While no existing studies focused specifically on helicopter parents and academic withdrawal or retention, helicopter parenting was found to be associated with the following behaviors in their children: decreased school engagement (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012), lower academic achievement (Luebbe et al., 2018), avoidance goals for learning (Schiffrin & Liss, 2017), procrastination (Hong et al., 2015), an avoidant decision-making style (Luebbe et al., 2018) and ineffective coping strategies such as withdrawal (Segrin et al., 2015). This literature also shows that helicopter parenting is associated with higher levels of children’s reported sense of entitlement and narcissism (Segrin et al., 2012, Segrin et al., 2013) and lower levels of self-control (Love et al., 2020). It appears that overly attentive and

hyper-involved parents instill in their child a belief that his or her needs are of great importance, while simultaneously preventing the child from adequate opportunities to develop important life skills (e.g., decision-making, coping). As a result, these children fail to develop empathy (McGinley, 2018) and have little concern for the welfare of others (Segrin & Flora, 2019). Given these findings, it is likely that children of helicopter parents may think and behave in a similar manner to the 26 percent of job seekers surveyed in the Indeed study who reported they ghosted because they did not feel comfortable telling the recruiter they changed their mind about the position, or the 11 percent who reported that they just did not know what to do, so they disappeared (Lewis, 2019). Therefore, we predict:

H11: *Helicopter parenting will be positively related to ghosting.*

METHOD

Sample

Our respondents consisted of 246 undergraduates recruited from business courses at a medium-sized university located in the southeast part of the U.S. IRB approval was received before administering with the survey. The sample consisted of 123 males (50%) and 123 females (50%). The mean age was 21.91 (sd=2.57).

Design and Procedure

Questionnaires were administered to students during class time. Participation was voluntary and adhered to Institutional Review Board guidelines. Each participant was randomly assigned to read one of four versions of a scenario that asked him or her to assume they were applying for jobs and had been invited for an interview at Company X. With respect to manipulations, the *low recruiter communication* version stated, “You were called and scheduled for an interview three weeks ago but haven’t heard anything from the recruiter since then” while the *high recruiter communication* version stated, “You were called and scheduled for an interview three weeks ago and the recruiter has been sending you weekly emails with information about the company, telling you she looks forward to your interview, and to please let her know if you have any questions in the meantime”. The *unfavorable company knowledge* version stated, “One of the positions is not at all attractive to you for many reasons” whereas the *unknown* version stated “You are not sure about one of the positions, it may be ok, you may even like it, but you are really not sure.” We did not include a *positive knowledge of the company* scenario as we believed it would be unlikely for a candidate to ghost such an employer. In sum, each participant was randomly assigned to read one of four vignettes in a 2 (unfavorable knowledge of company) x 2 (recruiter communication) between-subjects design.

Measures

Survey questionnaires contained the following sections: (1) study description and instructions, (2) scenario describing the job candidate’s knowledge of the company (unfavorable versus unknown favorability) and the recruiter’s communication level, (3) candidate’s attraction to the company and company interest in candidate, (4) conscientiousness, (5) helicopter parenting, and (6) ghosting.

Candidates’ Attraction to the Company

This measure consisted of three items adapted from Highhouse et al. (2003) including: “This company would be a good place for me to work”, “This company is attractive to me as a place for employment”, and “A job at this company is very appealing to me.” Respondents used a 6-point rating scale (1=strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). Coefficient alpha for this measure was .92.

Company Interest in Candidate

This measure also consisted of three items including: “This company has shown they are really interested in me”, “This company cares about me as a person”, and “This company has lost interest in me.”

Respondents used a 6-point rating scale (1= strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). Coefficient alpha for this measure was .84.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness was measured using eight items from Saucier's (1994) brief version of Goldberg's (1990) Unipolar Big-Five Markers. Respondents used a 6-point rating scale (1 = extremely inaccurate, 6 = extremely accurate). Coefficient alpha for this scale was .76.

Helicopter Parenting

The helicopter parenting scale consisted of the three-item measure of *preference for parental involvement* adapted from Karl et al. (2018). These items were as follows: "When I have a problem, I usually try to get my parent to work it out for me", "When I have to do something difficult, I want my parent to do at least some of it for me", "When something goes wrong in my life, I prefer to have my parent take care of it". Respondents rated their level of agreement with each item using a 6-point rating scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). Respondents rated first their mother and then their father. Cronbach's alpha was .83 for both preference for parental involvement scales. While this is not a measure of parental behavior, it has been found to be highly correlated with helicopter parenting ($r = .44, p < .001$, Karl et al., 2018). We believe it to be more relevant to this study since it measures an individual's preference for helicopter parenting behavior and, therefore, should be a more direct measure of an applicant's tendency to avoid difficult situations.

Ghosting

After the reading the scenario, respondents were asked to indicate how likely they would be to do each of the following: (1) not show up to the interview, (2) send an email, saying you changed your mind or have a better offer, or (3) go to the interview and do your best. Respondents used a 6-point rating scale (1 = extremely unlikely and 6 = extremely likely).

RESULTS

Table 1 reports means, standard deviations, and correlations for all study variables. All predictor variables were found to be significantly related to ghosting, except for knowledge of the company. Those respondents who had unfavorable knowledge of the company were just as likely to ghost as those who had no information about the company. See Table 1. Next, we conducted an ANOVA to determine the impact of the experimental manipulations of recruiter communication (low versus high) and knowledge of the company (unfavorable versus unknown) on our participants' perceptions of the attractiveness of the company. Significant differences were found whereby those in the high recruiter communication condition found the company to be more attractive than those in the low communication condition ($M = 3.45, sd = 1.24$, and $M = 2.48, sd = 1.03$, respectively; $F [1,241] = 49.10, p < .000$) and those in the no information condition rated the company as more attractive than those in the unfavorable information condition ($M = 3.36, sd = 1.12$, and $M = 2.49, sd = 1.17$, respectively; $F [1,241] = 41.62, p < .000$). Significant differences were also found for the impact of recruiter communication on respondents' perceptions of the company's interest in them. Those in the high recruiter communication condition rated the company's interest in them higher than those in the low communication condition ($M = 4.67, sd = .84$, and $M = 2.59, sd = .84$, respectively; $F [1,241] = 356.87, p < .000$).

Hypothesis Tests

Overall Model Estimation

Mplus 8.1 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017) was used to estimate the model parameters for both the measurement model (i.e., confirmatory factor analysis, CFA) and theorized structural models (i.e., SEM model). All models were estimated using a polychoric correlation matrix and weighted least-squares with mean and variance (WLSMV) estimator. For the purposes of latent variable scaling and model

identification, each latent factor variance was fixed at one. All cross-loadings were fixed at zero and the residual variances were assumed to be uncorrelated with other residual variances. Missing data was found to not be missing completely at random (MCAR) based on Little's (1988) MCAR test, $\chi^2(723) = 587.57$, $p = 1.0$. Regardless, all missing data were treated using the default procedures in Mplus when using WLSMV (Asparouhov and Muthén, 2010). It should be noted that Mplus does not impute missing values, but instead it uses all available data to estimate the model using weighted least squares – pairwise deletion (WLS-PD) or full information maximum likelihood (FIML).

Both the measurement model and structural model were estimated following the two-step approach proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). This two-step approach ensured that factorial validity exists (i.e., a good model fit and large standardized factor loadings) before testing the structural model. Without first assessing the measurement model, one cannot conclude whether model misfit resulted due to measurement concerns or the theoretical model proposed.

Measurement Model

The four-factor model, including candidates' perceptions of the company's interest in them, company attractiveness, conscientiousness and helicopter parenting, was found to have a good fit ($\chi^2(164) = 460.03$, $p < .001$, CFI = .97, TLI = .96, RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .06) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Additionally, the four-factor model was significantly better than the one-factor model ($\chi^2(170) = 3476.15$, $p < .001$, CFI = .66, TLI = .61, RMSEA = .28, SRMR = .24; $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 762.92$, $p < .001$). The single unmeasured latent factor (SUMLF) technique was used to test for common method variance (CMV; Podsakoff et al., 2003). The results demonstrated slightly improved fit ($\chi^2(144) = 309.26$, $p < .001$, CFI = .98, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .05). After incorporating the SUMLF method, our analyses indicated that CMV was not a concern. This was determined by the fact there was not a large decrease in estimated standard factor loadings when the results were compared with and without the SUMLF. Thus, the model has not been adjusted for CMV.

Structural Model

The structural model, which controlled for age, demonstrated good fit ($\chi^2(262) = 657.19$, $p < .001$, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .08). Additionally, the modification indices did not provide suggestions for alternative models with significantly improved fit. (See Figure 2). Support was found for hypotheses 1 and 2 such that greater recruiter communication was positively associated with candidates' perceptions of the company's interest in them ($B = .80$, $p < .001$) and candidates' attraction to the company ($B = .40$, $p < .001$). Hypothesis 3, which asserts that unfavorable knowledge of the company will negatively influence candidates' attraction to the company, was also supported, ($B = -.37$, $p < .001$). Hypothesis 4, suggesting candidates' perceptions of the company's interest in them would negatively relate to ghosting, was not supported ($B = -.16$, $p = .30$) but candidate's attraction to the company was found to be negatively related to ghosting ($B = -.23$, $p < .01$), thereby supporting Hypothesis 5. See Figure 2.

Regarding mediation effects, we found the relationship between recruiter communication and ghosting was mediated by candidates' attraction to the company supporting hypothesis 7 ($B = -.09$, $p < .01$, bias corrected CI_{95%} = -.40 to -.07). We also found the relationship between unfavorable knowledge of the company and ghosting was mediated by candidates' attraction to the company supporting hypothesis 8 ($B = .09$, $p < .01$, bias corrected CI_{95%} = .07 to .31). However, we found the relationship between the recruiter communication and ghosting was not mediated by the candidates' perceptions of the company's interest in them ($B = -.12$, $p = .30$, bias corrected CI_{95%} = -.69 to .19) thus, there was no support for hypothesis 6. Finally, an examination of the individual difference measures shows that gender (H9; $B = -.19$, $p < .05$), conscientiousness (H10; $B = -.20$, $p < .01$), and helicopter parenting (H11; $B = .20$, $p < .01$) were significantly related to ghosting supporting hypotheses 9, 10, and 11.

TABLE 1
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS AND CORRELATIONS AMONG ALL VARIABLES

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1. Gender	1.5	.50	---								
2. Conscientiousness	4.81	.67	.18**	---							
3. Helicopter parenting - prefer mother's involvement	3.39	.96	.09	-.23***	---						
4. Helicopter parenting - prefer father's involvement	1.95	1.04	.08	-.17**	.78***	---					
5. Recruiter communication (low versus high)	.46	.50	-.11	.08	-.05	-.04	---				
6. Unfavorable knowledge of company	.50	.50	-.05	.11	-.11	-.12	-.04	---			
7. Candidate's attraction to the company	2.92	1.22	-.03	.05	.00	.05	.39***	-.36***	---		
8. Candidates' perceptions of company's interest in them	3.5	1.35	-.11	.13*	-.14*	-.12	.77***	-.03	.51***	---	
9. Ghosting	1.47	.79	-.13*	-.23***	.17**	.20**	-.22***	.06	-.21***	-.20**	---

*p < .05

** p < .01

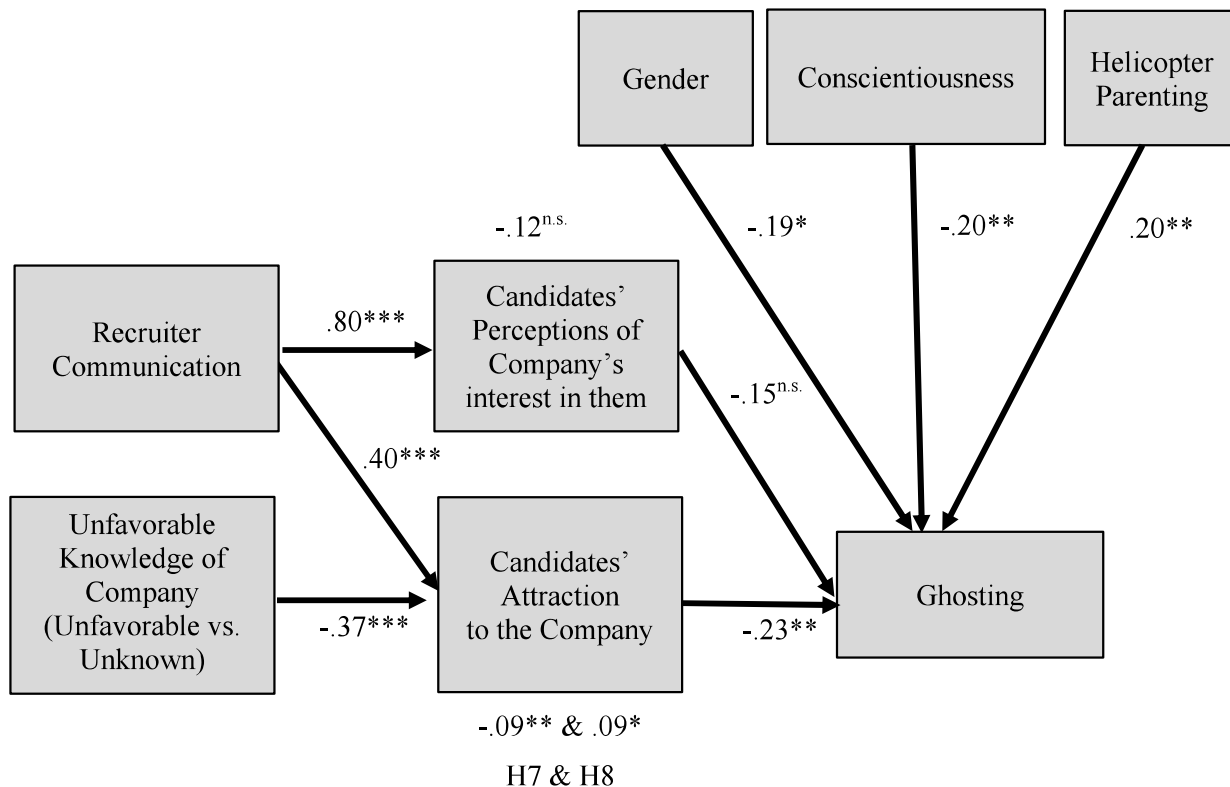
*** p < .001

Note: Gender was coded male = 1, female = 2; knowledge of company was coded 1 = unfavorable, 0 = unknown

DISCUSSION

Overall, our findings show that a number of factors are significantly related to ghosting, some stemming from individual differences and others from actions on the part of recruiters and/or employers. Communication from recruiters clearly plays a key role in influencing candidates' perceptions of the organization and its recruitment process. We found that high levels of communication from recruiters positively influenced both candidates' perceptions of the company's interest in them and their attraction to the company. Since a candidate's knowledge of the employing organization is often based on perceptions made from interactions with recruiters or other organizational communications (e.g., company website), employers need to be mindful of what they communicate and how they present themselves to the candidate. Our results show that both the frequency of communication and candidates' knowledge about the firm impacts the level of attraction that candidates feel towards an organization which, in turn, influences their likelihood to ghost an organization. Thus, we argue that employers need to recognize the importance of maintaining communication with candidates throughout all phases of the recruitment process, as well as being aware of what and how information is relayed to the candidate.

FIGURE 2
HYPOTHESIZED THEORETICAL MODEL OF THE PREDICTORS OF JOB CANDIDATE GHOSTING BEHAVIOR



As we expected, certain demographic and personality characteristics also influence ghosting behavior in the workplace. Those with low levels of conscientiousness were significantly more likely to ghost their employer, supporting previous studies on withdrawal from the recruitment process by those with less self-discipline. Gender can also influence ghosting behavior and, consistent with social role theory, we found that men were more likely than women to engage in such behavior. In addition, the more that candidates prefer parental involvement, the more likely they are to ghost a potential employer. It appears that the hovering behaviors of parents, whether it be the father or the mother, may be influencing avoidance behaviors in their child which manifests as ghosting in the workplace. Contrary to what was predicted, candidates' perceptions of the company's interest in them did not mediate the relationship between recruiter communication and ghosting. It appears that candidates who ghost are influenced by their personal attraction to the company and not by whether they believe the company is interested in them.

Implications

Our findings support the actions of those companies who are recognizing the importance of communication in the recruitment process. For example, some firms are making efforts to increase transparency in their recruitment process by providing information about the firm and its expectations, acknowledging receipt of all application materials, and giving a time frame for the application decision (Darden, 2018; Maurer, 2019; Walker et al., 2015). Others are stepping back and taking a different view of their recruitment efforts, looking for ways to streamline the process and incorporate technology for applicant tracking systems and candidate relationship management platforms to allow for more personalization and customized messaging (MacLellan, 2018). Still others have started taking actions to prevent ghosting. Of the nearly 900 firms surveyed in the Indeed study, 29 percent indicated that they now

have strategies in place to stop ghosting before it starts to reduce repeat offenders. Of those who have these strategies in place, 71 percent are now keeping records on “no-show” new hires, and 65 percent are tracking candidates who fail to show up for job interviews (Lewis, 2019).

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While this study showed that communication by recruiters is a key predictor of ghosting behavior, our focus was primarily on the frequency of communication by the company in its efforts to establish a stronger relationship with the candidate. Since many companies are looking for ways to utilize more technology in their recruitment process, future research should also examine the means of communication to determine whether some methods are more effective than others. For example, O’Connell (2019) indicates that many HR managers are utilizing texting, high-end customized chatbots, and artificial intelligence (AI) to drive engagement throughout the hiring process. While these may increase efficiency, it is possible they may also depersonalize the hiring process and contribute to the risk of ghosting. Recent research suggests that increased use of AI in the recruitment process is likely to raise concerns of fairness and lack of procedural justice which in turn could contribute to ghosting behavior (Wold & Sandberg, 2019). These factors warrant further investigation in future research.

In this study, we found that those with unfavorable knowledge of the company were less attracted to the company than those with no information, and those who were more attracted to the company were less likely to ghost. However, our operationalization of unfavorable knowledge was very limited in that the scenario read by participants stated that the position is “not at all attractive to you for many reasons”. We did not specify whether these reasons were pay, location, type of industry, and work environment or any other specific factor that might affect company attractiveness. Future research should examine type of information, as well as the amount of information, provided to candidates prior to the employment interview and its impact on ghosting.

Two other potentially important factors that were not examined in the current study are the availability of other employment alternatives and individual differences in conflict aversion. It is likely that, if candidates were aware of other equally viable employment alternatives, they would care less about the proposed employment option and be less committed to following through on the interview and/or communication exchange with the recruiter. This should be given closer consideration in future studies of ghosting behavior. Alternatively, ghosting may be due to the applicant’s concern about not wanting to hurt the recruiter’s feelings, uncertainty about how to effectively communicate when no longer interested in the company/position, or simply not knowing what to do (Lewis, 2019). Also, because existing research suggests that the children of helicopter parents may have a tendency to avoid or withdraw from difficult situations (Luebbe et al., 2018; Segrin, et al., 2015), future research should examine these variables and conflict aversion as possible mediators between helicopter parenting and ghosting.

CONCLUSION

Given the lack of academic research on ghosting behavior in the recruitment process, our study was an effort to fill that void. While our study provides some interesting findings, there remains much that is unknown. It is hoped that our suggestions for future research will encourage other researchers to build on the limitations of our study and expand what is known about ghosting behavior.

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