



Epistemic authority in employment interviews: Glancing, pointing, touching

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Abstract

Interviewers routinely orient to applicant files as they produce first pair parts (e.g. questions) that forward the business of the interview. As they do so, they make clear what they know, whether they already know it or are discovering it in the moment, whether it comes from the file in hand, and whether the applicant holds primary rights to confirm or amend that information. In these moments, participants work out issues of epistemic authority through an orchestration of multimodal behaviors, including talk, gesture, gaze, and touch. Our analysis focuses specifically on two discourse slots: when interviewers confirm specific information in side sequences; and when they gloss and assess general information while calling for an account. In the former, interviewers display minimal knowledge and secondary (deferred) epistemic authority; in the latter, they show strong knowledge and assert primary epistemic authority. This article demonstrates how epistemic authority, negotiated through embodied talk-in-interaction, contributes to how interviews unfold.

Keywords

accounts, conversation analysis, employment interviews, epistemic authority, gaze, gesture, multimodality, questions, touch

Employment interviews routinely involve both talk and use of documents, including those that applicants provide, such as resumes, cover letters, or professional certifications. Interviewers may use these documents as they produce first pair parts that call on applicants to explain or elaborate on the contents. In doing so, interviewers show what they know, and they claim rights to evaluate applicants and to formulate information

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about them. Such displays of *epistemic authority* (Heritage and Raymond, 2005) enable and constrain the kinds of responses applicants provide. They also contribute to the displayed role identities of interviewer and applicant.

Interviewers make use of applicant files in at least two distinct ways. Sometimes they glance at an applicant's file and give voice to some specific item they notice in it. In the following excerpt, as the applicant is asking the interviewer a question, the interviewer glances down (marked by a downward arrow at line 3), turns to the second page of the applicant's resume, and gazes at it while seeking confirmation of a detail (line 4).

Excerpt 1

- 1 Applicant: And uh secondly (.) what would be my biggest (.) say (.2)
 2 [challenge (.) [in working there.
 3 Interviewer: [▼ [((lifts top page to gaze at second one))
 4 Interviewer: And you're looking at a marketing assist[ant] position?
 5 Applicant: [Yes]
 6 Interviewer: Okay co[ol] hhhhhh I↑think(hh) the biggest challenge, and (.)
 7 [((places top page back on top of second one))
 8 and I can bring it to my personal experience=I've been there for
 9 two years ▲an:d I'm still trying to: (.5) figure out the companies
 10 because they are so big.

The applicant confirms minimally (line 5), and the interviewer begins to answer the question the applicant previously posed. The interviewer orients to the file on the way to a next action – as part of a side sequence (Jefferson, 1972) completed before providing a relevant second pair part answer. The interviewer's confirming question embeds a candidate answer (Pomerantz, 1988) which displays that she is not discovering this information for the first time. Her turning to a second page further reinforces the sense that she has already given the document some scrutiny as she knows where to locate information. However, by seeking confirmation of this fact, she grants the applicant primary epistemic rights to this bit of knowledge.

Other times, interviewers *gloss and assess* file information in a way that shows they have already studied its contents and can claim primary epistemic rights to what they are asserting:

Excerpt 2

- 1 Interviewer: I was looking over your resume
 2 Applicant: Sure
 3 (0.4)
 4 Interviewer: ▼ And noticed that you have a ▲
 5 (.) a really strong PR background

The colloquial, evaluative wording of 'really strong PR background' suggests that it is not a phrase read from the resume; rather, it is the interviewer's formulation of some

items she has perused. By gazing down and gesturing toward the file, she makes clear that it is the referent for her assessment.

These two instances represent two ways interviewers display knowledge of applicants' file information. In the first set of examples that we present below, an interviewer brings up specific file knowledge for confirmation. The applicant briefly confirms, and this side sequence shows participants orienting to the applicant's primary rights to this knowledge. The interviewer then pursues a next, more complex action, such as answering an applicant's question. In the second set of examples, interviewers gloss and assess portions of the file as part of complex first pair parts that call on applicants to account for possible inconsistencies in their records. Interviewers produce these turns in ways that demonstrate their knowledge of file contents and their primary epistemic right to gloss and assess the contents. Applicants acknowledge but do not align with the assessments, staying ready for the completion of the unfolding first pair part.

In all of these examples, participants display knowledge and negotiate primary and secondary rights to know and to evaluate. Through such implicit negotiations, they constitute their respective identities of interviewer and applicant. These epistemic matters deeply involve multimodal aspects of interaction – verbal exchanges as well as gaze, gesture, and touch – all used to show orientation to files and to embodied selves.

Epistemics, multimodality, and employment interviews

Speakers make relevant what they know and what they have rights to know vis-à-vis their interlocutors. Knowledge, seen in this light, is not stable or a property of the unseen mind but rather a resource for, and communicatively constituted product of, interaction. For example, a first assessment implies a claim of primary epistemic rights to assess. A second position assessment may be weaker in that agreeing with a first assessment does not necessarily show independent knowledge or opinion. Second assessment speakers can *upgrade* their epistemic authority with repeat/confirmations, 'oh'-prefaced second assessments, or by usurping the 'firstness' of previous assessments with tag questions or negative interrogatives (Heritage and Raymond, 2005). Even when a second speaker confirmation is not otherwise relevant, second speakers will sometimes confirm by repeating a preceding assertion made by another speaker, in modified form with stress on a copula or auxiliary verb:

(Schegloff, 1996; in Stivers, 2005: 146)

3 GIR: That was Alison's job

4 TEA: Oh that's right. It is Alison's job.

This undermines the first speaker's default ownership and asserts the second speaker's primary rights (Stivers, 2005).¹

Our analysis extends this work by investigating epistemic displays in employment interviews and by attending to multimodal practices for displaying what one knows. A few previous studies of employment interviews concern interactional features that contribute to judgments of applicants. Button (1992) showed how interviewers, by withholding clarifications, influence applicants' responses and work against the very

fairness they are trying to create. Gumperz (1992) showed how native speakers offer more elaborate answers to interview questions than non-native speakers, and this difference leads to employment decisions that favor the more loquacious native speakers. More germane to the present study, Komter (1986) found that, at the beginning of an interview, interviewers regularly state 'the obvious' (e.g. 'So we are sitting here as a committee of three'), which indexes shared knowledge and projects how interaction will proceed. In a study of alignment talk in employment interviews, Ragan and Hopper (1981) found that if an interviewer questions an applicant's career path, the applicant may provide an account to justify or normalize the career history, as illustrated by the following exchange (Ragan and Hopper, 1981: 90):

Interviewer: Uh, why did you decide to leave something that seemed to be- you seemed to be pretty well equipped for and go on into something else?

Applicant: Well, even though I enjoyed optometry, I've been interested in health services administration field for quite a bit longer than that. Ah, as my resume says . . .

Ragan and Hopper argue that 'offering accounts retrospectively constructs the Interviewer's preceding question as critical, accusative, or as containing a hidden agenda' (p. 93; see also Ragan, 1983).

Extending CA research on employment interviews, we also examine people's *visible* behaviors, such as their embodied use of files.² Emphasizing multimodal aspects of interaction (see e.g. Jones and LeBaron, 2002; Stivers and Sidnell, 2005; Streeck et al., in press) acknowledges that 'body parts are the first mediating elements in our interaction with the people and objects around us' (Duranti, 1997: 322); that 'talk in interaction shares billing with space, with artifacts, with work, and with the visible palpable body' (Moerman, 1990: 182); and that 'human action is built through the simultaneous deployment of a range of quite different kinds of semiotic resources' (Goodwin, 2000: 2). Like in many other institutional interactions involving documents and files, participants organize these interviews spatially and temporally, visually and vocally.

The data for this study are drawn from video recordings of employment interviews conducted between 2001 and 2006 at two locations in the United States. All the applicants were students enrolled in undergraduate or graduate programs in such fields as business administration, finance, journalism, and publishing. Interviews were held on university campuses for the possibility of either internships or entry-level full-employment positions.³

In brief, then, the literature cited above guides our attention to interaction in employment interviews, to multimodal displays, and to matters of epistemic authority.

Analysis

Interviewers routinely orient to applicant files as they produce first pair parts that forward the business of the interview. As they do so, they make clear what they know, whether they already know it or are discovering it in the moment, whether it comes from the file, and whether the applicant holds primary rights to confirm or amend that information. In these moments, participants work out issues of epistemic authority across

multiple modes, including talk, gesture, gaze, and touch. These orientations happen regularly in two slots: confirming specific information in side sequences; and glossing and assessing general information in calling for accounts. In the former, interviewers display minimal knowledge and deferred epistemic authority; in the latter, they assert strong knowledge claims and primary epistemic authority.

Noticing and confirming

Interviewers verbalize specific information from applicant files in first pair parts seeking confirmation, and these confirmation sequences are preliminary to next, more involved actions. In the following excerpt, the confirmation sequence precedes and projects the beginning of the applicant's request to expand on the job description:

Excerpt 3

- | | | |
|----|--------------|---|
| 1 | Interviewer: | So what do you wanna find out from me and I'm gonna take some |
| 2 | | notes too |
| 3 | Applicant: | Uh well↑ are you able to uh: to uh talk about the job |
| 4 | | descriptio:n [u m :] is there any more you would like |
| 5 | Interviewer: | [Mm hm] |
| 6 | Applicant : | to share in addition to what was poste:d |
| 7 | Interviewer: | Mm hm↑ ▼ ((Figure 3a)) absolutely= |
| 8 | | =So you're looking at editorial assistant, |
| 9 | Applicant: | That's right= |
| 10 | Interviewer: | Okay ▲.((Figure 3b)) hh um I'm talking in more o:f(1.0) general terms |
| 11 | | because these are like anticipated openings |

The interviewer has arranged the space so that she can easily examine both the documents and the applicant. She is seated at the head of the table, with her chair and body turned toward the applicant; at the same time, the applicant's file is open in front of her, at her finger tips and accessible at a glance. She glances down at the file (Figure 3a) as she formulates a statement of the candidate's job interests (line 8). The applicant confirms (line 9), and the interviewer acknowledges and looks up (line 10, Figure 3b). Rather than read the



Figure 3a



Figure 3b

file silently, or ask the applicant directly without referring to the file, the interviewer uses the file as a resource in producing her turn at talk, calling on the applicant to confirm her articulated understanding of its contents. In doing so, the interviewer displays that she is reading and making sense of the contents of the file in the moment, rather than formulating an already established understanding. She asserts no independent knowledge of the file; instead, her turn presumes that the applicant can confirm the accuracy of the information.

Such routine confirmation-seeking can precede more complicated, even challenging, sequences. In the instance below, the interviewer confirms 'finance track' before posing a question that contrasts this track to 'humanities':

Excerpt 4

- | | | |
|----|--------------|--|
| 1 | Interviewer: | Probably a question you've probably heard before |
| 2 | | but ▼ ((Figure 4a)) (0.4) ((points)) you're doing the |
| 3 | | finance track here at {this university} ((Figure 4b)) |
| 4 | Applicant: | I am doing the finance track |
| 5 | | (0.2) |
| 6 | Interviewer: | <u>So</u> (0.2) what made you ▲ decide to, ((Figure 4c)) |
| 7 | | you know, with a humanities background to go |
| 8 | | into finance and (0.4) you know, has it been |
| 9 | | (0.4) it been difficult for you or (0.6) |
| 10 | Applicant: | It has been a challenge... |



Figure 4a



Figure 4b



Figure 4c

The interviewer begins with a disclaimer ('probably a question you've probably heard before'), suggesting that he is prepared to ask a question that others might have already asked. After the conjunction 'but' (line 2) the interviewer looks down at the file (Figure 4a). He observes aloud that the applicant is in the 'finance track' of his university program (line 3). In this way, he invites the applicant to confirm a detail in the file before continuing with his question. While talking, he puts his finger on a specific line and leans sharply toward it, as though examining it very closely (Figure 4b). The interviewer then looks up (Figure 4c) and asks the question that his earlier disclaimer projected: if the applicant has a humanities background (a field that, according to stereotypes, attracts arithmophobes), why did he decide to become an MBA student in finance (lines 6–8)?

The interviewer orients to the file through gaze, touch and posture, while talking about two elements in the applicant's record (finance and humanities) that, in combination, provide the basis for a challenging question. The interviewer makes clear what he knows, that he already knows it, and the source of his knowledge. His exaggerated examination of a single line precisely locates a potential problem for which he then calls on the applicant to account. By pausing for the repeat-confirmation, he treats the applicant as having primary rights to this knowledge. By confirming, the applicant asserts primary epistemic rights; by doing nothing more, he returns the floor to the interviewer, thus treating this question as preliminary and not requiring elaboration. Confirming the applicant's 'rights' to this fact sets him up for the next question, which calls on him to account for making the change from humanities to finance.

Another example similarly shows an interviewer locating information in the file and calling for an account:

Excerpt 5

- | | | |
|---|--------------|--|
| 1 | Interviewer: | ((Figure 5a)) Yeah it ▼ says here um ((Figure 5b)) |
| 2 | | you say on your resume here that you (.) got |
| 3 | | your (0.5) bachelor's degree in exercise ▲ |
| 4 | | ((Figure 5c)) physiology |
| 5 | Applicant: | Yes |
| 6 | | (0.4) |
| 7 | Interviewer: | And now you're so- going on with your MBA |
| 8 | | (0.2) <u>explain</u> the process there [for me |
| 9 | Applicant: | [Okay um... |

The interviewer projects her question by looking down at the file, pointing to a specific line, and leaning toward it as though examining it carefully (Figure 5b). At the same time, she explicitly tells the applicant that she is looking at the resume, which makes the object of her attention and the source of her information unmistakable: 'it says here' (line 1) and 'you say on your resume here' (line 2), showing that she is already and specifically informed. After she observes a fact in the file (lines 2–4), she looks up at the applicant, with palm open and extended (line 3, Figure 5c), which functions as a visual prompt for the applicant to take the floor and speak to the information she has read. He confirms the information (line 5). Then comes her challenging question, which



Figure 5a



Figure 5b



Figure 5c

calls on him to account for going from undergraduate work in exercise physiology to an MBA. Similar to the prior instance, the interviewer displays what she knows and the source. She defers to the applicant’s primary epistemic authority, which he asserts by confirming the fact. He does nothing more, returning the floor to her to continue with a first pair part calling for an account. Her question uses his information to call on him to account for a possible inconsistency.

In the preceding examples, two bits of information are brought together, creating a possible inconsistency for which the applicant must account. In the following example, the applicant is called on to account for two issues: one concerns staying at the same university for both degrees; the other concerns the respective majors he pursued. The interviewer draws on file materials for the first one and on prior talk for the second.

Excerpt 6

- | | | |
|---|--------------|--|
| 1 | Interviewer: | ((Figure 6a)) Great ▼ well I’m interested |
| 2 | | ((Figure 6b)) tell me I’m looking at your resume |
| 3 | | you (0.4) attended ▲ ((Figure 6c)) |
| 4 | | {this university} <u>before</u> |
| 5 | Applicant: | [Mm hmm |
| 6 | Interviewer: | [And you said you were in advertising (.) slash |
| 7 | | marketing right? |
| 8 | Applicant: | ▼ Marketing communications is |
| 9 | | [what they call it |

10 Interviewer: [Uh (0.4) so two questions for ya (.)
11 ▲ why {this university} (.) for a graduate degree
12 and why finance now
13 (0.8)
14 Applicant: Well I- I (0.3) pretty much (.) decided...



Figure 6a



Figure 6b



Figure 6c

The interviewer projects his question by looking down at the file and pointing to a specific line with the pen in his left hand (Figure 6b), saying ‘well I’m interested’ (line 1). He explicitly tells the applicant that he is looking at the resume (line 2), making the object of his attention unmistakable. By going so quickly to a specific line of the file, the recruiter shows that he is returning to information already known – not looking at the file for the first time. He asks the applicant to confirm a fact in the file (lines 3 and 4), which the applicant does with a continuer (line 5). He then seeks confirmation of another fact (lines 6 and 7). The applicant gives a corrected version of the name of his prior academic program. The interviewer calls for the applicant to account for this suspect history: why is he getting a graduate degree at a university that he already attended (line 11), and why is he in a finance program if his background is in marketing communications (line 12)? Thus, the recruiter notices a detail, gets it confirmed, and invokes a second ‘fact’. Juxtaposing those facts, he creates a potential problem for which the applicant must account. In doing so, he makes clear what he ‘knows’, from what sources, and who holds primary rights to this knowledge of the applicant’s history.

Glossing and assessing

In another set of instances, interviewers *gloss* some portion of the contents of an applicant's file and *assess* it (and thus, the applicant) as part of longer turns calling on applicants to account for possible inconsistencies in their backgrounds. By orienting to the file at such critical moments, interviewers locate the source of the emerging question and thus project the topic which a response should address. Interviewers assert epistemic authority to gloss contents of the file and evaluate them. In doing so, they invoke their identity as interviewer. Like noticing and confirming, glossing and assessing actions operate as components of first pair parts calling on applicants to provide answers.

In the excerpt below, the interviewer incrementally builds a first pair part, which asks the applicant to account for her interest in the company. The applicant begins by producing two consecutive 'tell me' directives (lines 1 and 2). Although each is syntactically complete, she does not pause for a response but continues talking. As she talks, she glances down at the file (Figure 7b) and assesses its contents, 'obviously I see a lot of publishing background' (line 3). The applicant aligns with the assessment (line 4) minimally at the same time that the interviewer provides another assessment, 'so that's exciting'. Following a third 'tell me' directive (line 5), the applicant begins to answer.

Excerpt 7

- 1 Interviewer: U m (.5) .nt Tell me why- (.25) you applied to us today. tell me your
 2 interest in {Books Inc.} ((Figure 7a)) ▼ and obviously ((sweeping gesture,
 3 Figure 7b)) I see a lot of ▲ publishing background so th[at's exciting]
 4 Applicant: [° Y e a h °]
 5 Interviewer: So tell me a little about why you've chosen us. (.) today
 6 Applicant: Well I chose {Books Inc.} because it's an educational (.) publishing (.) leader.
 7 which I think (1.7) g-gives them the challenge that they're- they set the
 8 standard for the other education publishers so they can be: (.) mo:re (0.7)
 9 ((smacks lips)) more opportunities to be creati:ve to use new
 10 technologies and I think that they're (1.0) they're really °um° meeting
 11 that ↑challenge↓ you know, with- the different programs that they have
 12 as far as the digital learning program.

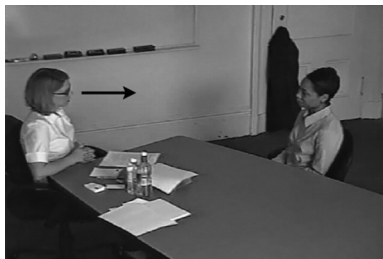


Figure 7a



Figure 7b

The assessment ‘a lo:t o:f ▲ publishing background’ asserts knowledge of the applicant’s file and comparative knowledge of applicants in this industry. While saying this, the interviewer looks down at the file (Figure 7b), locating it as one source of her knowledge. The adverb ‘obviously’ casts this positive assessment as something any reasonable person would recognize, thereby upgrading her commitment to it. While speaking, she moves her hand in a sweeping, circular gesture across the surface of the file (Figure 7b), which works as a visible ‘gloss’ – a way of indexing the entire contents rather than pointing to a specific phrase or line. These actions, plus the absence of any evidence that she is reading from the file, make clear that she is not discovering this knowledge in the moment but has already acquired it. The subsequent assessment ‘so that’s exciting’ displays her enthusiasm as a representative of her organization at encountering the applicant’s credentials. Through a coordination of talk, gaze, and gesture, she communicates *what* she knows, *when* she came to know it, *where* her knowledge came from, and *who* she is in relation to her question and the current activity.

This epistemic work is consequential to the unfolding interaction. In the third ‘tell me’ directive (line 5), the ‘you’ve chosen us’ wording treats the applicant deferentially, at least in contrast to the earlier directives (lines 1 and 2). In this way the interviewer marks the sequential influence of her own inserted assessments. By the end of her turn, she has given clear indicators to the applicant that a relevant response will account for the applicant’s interest in this organization while orienting to the interviewer’s knowledge and positive assessments of her. The beginning of the applicant’s response (line 6) shows her aligning with the notion that she (as a strong applicant) has indeed done the choosing. Thus, the interviewer manages her epistemic authority (rights and knowledge) in ways that shape the unfolding turn and the response to it.

In the next instance, the interviewer also gives a gloss of the applicant’s file, showing that he knows it generally.

Excerpt 8

- | | | |
|----|--------------|--|
| 1 | Interviewer: | ((Figure 8a)) ▲ Okay ▼ ((Figure 8b)) |
| 2 | | (0.4) |
| 3 | Interviewer: | What were s- the factors that |
| 4 | | you were doing obviously very well ((Figure 8c)) |
| 5 | | at your (0.4) at your job there moving quite |
| 6 | | (0.6) quite rapidly [what |
| 7 | Applicant: | [Mm hm |
| 8 | Interviewer: | >What were ▲ the factors that made you decide |
| 9 | | to come back to< school. |
| 10 | | (0.5) |
| 11 | Applicant: | The factors that deci- made me decide to come back we:re |

The interviewer begins a question (line 3), but then abandons it momentarily to assess positively a portion of the applicant’s background. He does two versions of an assessment: first, that the applicant was ‘doing obviously very well’ and second, that he was ‘moving quite rapidly’. The applicant provides a continuer (line 7), returning the floor to the interviewer, who restarts and completes asking the question he began prior to the assessments.



Figure 8a



Figure 8b



Figure 8c

Vocally and visibly the interviewer shows the source of his knowledge. First, he looks down at the file (line 1), marking its relevance in the moment. Then he waves his left hand back and forth above the surface of the file (Figure 8c), a gestural gloss that indexes the entire file. Having displayed that he knows the contents of the file enough to summarize and assess them, the interviewer looks up at the applicant and returns to his earlier question (lines 8–9). By positively assessing the applicant's record, he shows that he knows the record and that he knows what constitutes success. Similar to its use in excerpt 7, the adverb 'obviously' casts this positive assessment as something any reasonable person would recognize and thus upgrades his commitment to it. Through a coordination of talk, gaze, and gesture, he communicates *what* he knows, *when* he came to know it, *where* his knowledge came from, and *who* he is in relation to his question and the current activity.

Managing displays of knowledge is consequential to the unfolding interaction. The interviewer's question presumes a puzzle: why would someone who is doing 'very well' on a particular job path decide to return to school? An answer fitted to this first pair part would address not only the 'factors' that brought the applicant back to school, but also how those factors made sense in light of an already successful career track. In this way, information in the file serves as shared knowledge for the participants to construct this sequence.

Previous instances have shown interviewers orienting to files in two kinds of actions: noticing and confirming details (granting primary epistemic authority to applicants) in side sequences or in turns calling for accounts; and glossing and assessing (which assert primary epistemic rights) in first pair parts calling for accounts. The following instance (same as excerpt 2 above, expanded) shows the interviewer using both types in constructing a multi-unit first pair part. He reports a noticing (lines 1, 4) and assesses the applicant's 'really strong PR background'. The applicant accepts this assessment with

‘Okay’ but does nothing more, returning the floor to the interviewer. The interviewer continues with the contrastive conjunction ‘but’ and then formulates a fact from the file (lines 8-9). The applicant confirms this (line 10). The interviewer discloses that he has a similar ‘disconnect’ in his own background and then requests an account. The applicant expresses willingness to explain and begins doing so.

Excerpt 9

- 1 Interviewer: I was looking over your resume ((Figure 9a))
- 2 Applicant: Sure
- 3 (0.4)
- 4 Interviewer: ▼ ((Figure 9b)) And noticed that you have a ▲
- 5 (.) a really strong PR background ((Figure 9c))
- 6 (0.2)
- 7 Applicant: Okay
- 8 Interviewer: ▼ You know, but (.) it says ((Figure 9d)) that ▲
- 9 you're in school for a finance track [you know
- 10 Applicant: [Right
- 11 Interviewer: I've- I've had the same problem a little di- (.)
- 12 disconnect in my background ▼ I was just
- 13 wondering if you could ▲ kind of bridge the gap
- 14 for me between public relations and finance
- 15 Applicant: Sure (.) be happy to do that . . .



Figure 9a



Figure 9b



Figure 9c



Figure 9d

The interviewer carefully manages epistemic displays in forming up this first pair part. The past tense verb ('was' on line 1) marks that he has already gathered information about the applicant. Combined with the verb 'noticed' (line 4), he formulates his prior action as having scanned and discovered this knowledge, rather than having specifically sought it. The assessment in line 5 claims his knowledge of and rights to evaluate the applicant's qualifications (presumably in comparison to those of other applicants). This epistemic work is accomplished through gaze and movement as well as noticing and assessing. The interviewer glances down at the file three times (lines 4, 8, and 12), but only briefly and only after his question is already underway. He holds the file in his hand and moves the paper emphatically, consonant with the rhythm of his voice. Thus, he makes apparent that he is not learning this information in the moment but is indexing the source of already-obtained knowledge. The interviewer locates a next spoken detail directly in the file, both verbally ('it says') and visually (gazing at the file). In brief, he asserts rights to formulate and assess file materials and he asserts knowledge of file details. In response to the gloss and assessment, the applicant's 'Okay' (line 7) shows readiness to move on but does not provide any uptake. In response to the informational details, the applicant's confirming 'Right' (line 10) asserts his primary epistemic rights to this knowledge.

Noticing and confirming, and glossing and assessing, are produced as part of or preliminary to other actions such as calling for accounts. The ways interviewers mark what they know, from where, and who owns primary rights to what knowledge, become resources for the construction of interview actions and shape the kinds of responses most relevant.

Discussion

Employment interviews could probably be conducted without files (e.g. documents, resumes, application forms, and other papers), but they are not, which raises questions about why and how files are being used. In all of our videotaped interviews, files are literally at the center of things: put on the table, located between the participants so that the papers become an object of joint attention, but also located closer to the interviewer so that he/she maintains manual control and visual access. Frequently, interviewers look down at files in front of them, either glancing at them quickly or examining them more carefully. Sometimes interviewers gesture in relation to the papers, such as with sweeping movements that encompass the whole or pointing behaviors that highlight particular words or lines. Occasionally, interviewers handle their papers by touching, lifting, holding, or moving them. All of these embodied behaviors – looking, gesturing, and handling – may be combined with each other and coordinated with talk such that files become an interactive resource for conducting an interview. An array of discursive actions (e.g. questions, answers, and assessments) may be accomplished or assisted through embodied maneuvers that are subtle yet visible, helping to specify the origin of a question, the scope of an answer, the warrant for an assessment, and so forth.

Epistemic authority, which is the primary focus of our analysis, is negotiated and displayed through talk and embodied actions that include files. When interviewers ask questions, give answers, and make assessments, they show what they know, how they know it, and who has the right to know it – not only through what they say but also through the way they look, gesture, and handle files.

Our analysis features two distinct displays of epistemic authority. On the one hand, interviewers may defer to applicants about facts or details in files, which shows that applicants have primary epistemic authority over the documents that they have presumably authored. Deferring may begin with *noticing* (see excerpts 3, 4, 5, and 6), which is publicly performed, rather than privately experienced. By simultaneously talking and gazing at a file, interviewers make themselves and their looking objects of an applicant's attention (Goodwin, 1981). By lifting paper (excerpt 3), leaning sharply (excerpt 4), pointing precisely (excerpts 4 and 5), or announcing explicitly (excerpts 5 and 6), interviewers can make their noticing all the more obvious. After noticing comes *confirming*, when applicants have an opportunity to affirm or amend the facts or details that have been noticed. Through this interactive pattern of noticing and confirming, interviewers are cast as secondary authorities regarding the details of files – they are not authors, but they are readers. Deferring to an applicant may function as a prelude to other interview actions, such as asking the applicant to elaborate on some point ('can you tell me more about this?') or account for an apparent inconsistency ('how does this make sense?'). Thus, micro-practices of epistemic authority are foundational to the central challenges and purposes of an employment interview.

On the other hand, interviewers may articulate the upshot of an entire file's contents, which asserts their primary epistemic authority over what a file means for a particular position or profession. Our analysis identifies two interrelated actions: *glossing*, which summarizes or generalizes across details of a file;⁴ and *assessing*, which evaluates the overall worth or merit of a file. For example, one interviewer (excerpt 7) refers to information in a file by talking about it generally ('I see a lot of publishing background') and by gesturing toward it non-specifically (Figure 7b). In this way, she looks and orients toward the file, not to get or confirm information, but to show efficiently that she already has it. Her subsequent assessment ('So that's exciting') shows enthusiasm that assumes or asserts knowledge of her industry. By behaving as one already familiar with the contents of the file, and in relation to a particular industry, she sets the stage for a potentially challenging question that calls upon the applicant to elaborate beyond the information in her file. Through patterns of glossing and assessing, involving both audible and visible behaviors, interviewers communicate *what* they know, *how* they know it, and *who* they are in relation to the current activity.

Managing epistemic authority is not the overt focus of these participants' activities, but how they manage it deeply shapes how the activities unfold. These epistemic moments occur as part of larger actions – producing second pair part answers to applicant questions, or first pair parts calling for accounts. In excerpts 1 and 3, interviewers temporarily defer authority on small details, inviting brief confirmation or correction. Doing so at this location – once their second pair part answer is underway – projects that the file detail is relevant to the unfolding answer. For example, in excerpt 1 the interviewer seeks confirmation that the applicant is looking for an 'editorial assistant' position before she answers the applicant's question. In the other instances, how interviewers gloss and assess file materials shape the first pair part actions in progress. For example, in excerpt 7, the interviewer's formulation and positive assessment of the applicant's publishing background separate two versions of a first pair part summons for information. The account solicited in the second summons ('why you've chosen us') suggests that the applicant was the one who decided to apply to this organization.

In combination, these elements display deference toward the applicant, and in her response ('Well I chose {Books Inc.} because...') the applicant implicitly accepts this definition of the relationship.

Whether confirming specific file details or glossing general file contents, interviewers defer primary epistemic rights over the file contents to applicants. Such deference comes with a social cost: granting the other primary epistemic rights also makes that person responsible for file information. This provides a strategic resource for interviewers to compel applicants to account for potentially problematic aspects or implications of their file information. In excerpt 5, the interviewer sets up a contrast: first, she refers to specific information in the file ('it says here, you got your bachelors degree in exercise physiology') and points to a particular line (Figure 5b); then she addresses the applicant ('now you're going on with your MBA'). In this way, she uses the file to call on the applicant to account for an inconsistent career path. In several of these instances (see excerpts 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9) first pair parts formulate possible disjuncts in the applicant's biography. Four concern a change of majors from undergraduate to graduate studies: from humanities into finance (excerpt 4), exercise physiology into an MBA (excerpt 5), advertising slash marketing to finance (excerpt 6), and public relations to finance (excerpt 9). Another interviewer formulates a disjunct between doing well at a job and choosing to go back to school (excerpt 8). A cursory examination of applicants' responses (not analyzed) affirms that they treat the first pair parts as calling for accounts. Ragan and Hopper argue that 'offering accounts retrospectively constructs the Interviewer's preceding question as critical, accusative, or as containing a "hidden agenda"' (1981: 93; see also Ragan, 1983). Although not all pairs examined here reflect antagonistic stances, several do. More to the point, all demonstrate that deferring primary epistemic authority to another does not necessarily empower that person, and in fact may constrain the other and make the other responsible to account for aspects of the information. In these ways, interviewers' epistemic displays are integral to the activities in which they are engaged.

Through such displays of epistemic rights and authority, participants constitute their *identities* as interviewer and applicant. Raymond and Heritage (2006: 4) argue that the 'management of rights to knowledge and, relatedly, rights to describe or evaluate states of affairs can be a resource for invoking identity in interaction'. Seen in this way, an interviewer is one who asserts (and is granted) the right to review, ask about, gloss, and assess file information while speaking with the applicant.⁵ In addition, these interviewers assert a particular *kind* of interviewer identity. They make evident that they have reviewed file materials in advance – that they are 'knowing recipients' (Goodwin, 1979). Displaying oneself as already informed is not essential to doing being an interviewer (indeed, there are other excerpts in our collections when interviewers orient to file materials in ways that show them to be discovering information in the moment). However, doing so may invite evaluations of the interviewer as prepared – which may be understood as one dimension of competence. Another dimension of competence – expertise – is implicitly asserted when interviewers assess file materials.⁶ To evaluate an applicant as having a 'really strong PR background' (excerpt 9) or as 'doing obviously very well' (excerpt 8) is to assert epistemic authority about the comparative frame of reference – to have some sense of what makes a strong or weak PR background, or what 'doing well' would look like on

a resume. In addition to ‘competent’, interviewers may also show themselves as ‘helpful’ in the ways they manage epistemic rights. For example, when an interviewer (excerpt 9) repeatedly glances down at a file, thereby asserting his knowledge of it in the course of calling for an account, his glances momentarily divert focus from the applicant toward the file as the location of the problem to be repaired. He uses the file as an oblique and diplomatic entry⁷ into the challenging question. The same glances used to set up the challenging question also mitigate its sharpness.⁸ In these various ways, then, interviewers mark their institutional identities in and through how they manage epistemics. They show what as interviewers they have the right to know and evaluate. They claim their epistemic authority in ways that may mark their identities as prepared, informed, and helpful – as good interviewers. In brief, these moments in employment interviews display the deep connections between epistemics and identity, between what we know and who we are. Knowledge and identity, in turn, are inextricably located in sequentially organized interaction (see Tsoukas, 2005). What interviewers ‘know’ about applicants and their files gets displayed and transformed moment by moment as they talk. Seen in this way, knowledge and identity are both consequences of and consequential to the business at hand.

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Notes

1. Among conversation analysts, epistemic authority is a relatively recent topic. The terms ‘rights’ and ‘authority’ sometimes seem to be used interchangeably and other times seem to be employed with distinction. For example, Stivers (2005a: 155) formulates the research question: ‘Who has rights to know what with how much authority?’ For our purposes, we will use the term *rights* to index role-related claims to knowledge and *authority* to refer to grounds for claiming knowledge.
2. Similarly, researchers have examined the interactive use of files during doctor–patient meetings. For example, Robinson (1998) analyzed the opening moments of medical consultations, when doctors may use a patient’s file in ways that organize the onset of medical care; Robinson and Stivers (2001) studied activity transitions during consultations; and Heath (1986, 2002) showed how doctors may use files interactively and strategically during the closing moments of a consultation.
3. At one data collection site, all the interviews were conducted by recruiters seeking to fill current or anticipated positions. At the other site, interviews were conducted either by recruiters seeking to fill positions or by second-year MBA students; however, the applicants did not know which of the two they encountered. In addition to variation in geographical location and professional fields, the recordings reflect some variation in participants’ sex and ethnicity.
4. Glosses are similar to *formulations* (Drew, 2003; Heritage and Watson, 1979) which put into words the gist or upshot of some preceding talk; here, the glosses bring forward the gist of contents of the file.
5. In this regard, excerpt 9 stands out in our collection in that the interviewer invokes an additional aspect of his identity (as one who has himself had to explain disjunctions in his record)

- to account for a first pair part he is producing. In framing his response as a favor to the interviewer ('Sure (.) be happy to do that') the applicant confirms this shift in footing.
6. There are other ways to show expertise; for example, the interviewer's 'online commentary' (Heritage and Stivers, 1999) in excerpt 6, line 2 asserts his competence at reviewing and formulating file materials, while also making explicit the source of information he is using to construct a first pair part.
 7. In their ethnographic study of how paper documents are used in a high-tech company, Sellen and Harper (2002) observe that people wishing to collaborate on writing projects use their hard-copy as a kind of hall pass for approaching a colleague, or entering the office of a high-ranking manager to discuss relevant issues. Sometimes entries (into a conversation or someone's space) are easier with paper leading the way.
 8. By contrast, it is entirely possible to refer to file materials in ways that mark one's role identity as non-helpful or even antagonistic. This may well occur routinely in police interviews of suspects, cross-examinations in courtroom trials, etc.

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Appendix: Transcription conventions

Our transcription conventions, listed in Appendix Table 1, have been adapted from a transcription system developed by Gail Jefferson (see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984).

Appendix Table 1. Transcription conventions

Symbol	Name	Description
yes	underline	vocal stress or emphasis through increased volume
-	hyphen	halting, abrupt cut off of sound
(0.8)	timed silence	length of pause by tenths of a second
(.)	micropause	short pause, less than 0.2 seconds
[brackets	overlapping talk, precisely located
(())	double parentheses	visible behaviors; transcriber's comments
▼	down arrow	interviewer looks down at file
▲	up arrow	interviewer looks up at applicant

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