

WHAT ARE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL SELLING AS A CAREER?

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ABSTRACT

An understanding of the perceptions of students toward personal selling is an important area of study. Personal selling is a critical marketing activity that accounts for a major portion of the revenue generation for any company. Those who sell the products are the life blood of an organization. Absent the ability to sell products and services, a company is in serious jeopardy of losing its competitive edge and its worth as a company. Recruiting future sales professionals is vital to the continued success and sustainability of business entities. This study surveys and investigates students' perceptions of the selling profession. A major finding of our study indicates that, overall, there is no significant difference between a male or female student's perceptions of a sales career. Additionally, there was a significant difference between non-business majors and business majors in their desire to enter the selling field. Students who had family members affiliated with the sales field had some major differences in opinions on several factors.

INTRODUCTION

Many business students initially enter the workforce through the sales field, and, consequently, there has been a continued interest in assessing said students' perceptions of the sales field as a career path. As noted by Stevens and Macintosh (2002–2003, p. 23), this “interest is fueled by the fact that college students make up a large and attractive pool of job candidates,” recruiting companies “would like to know the reasons why students are or are not attracted to sales” and professors want to “know what role education plays in students' attitudes and perceptions of sales as a career.” Although personal selling can offer a rewarding and fulfilling career, many students have a negative impression of selling. The reason for this negative sentiment may be embedded in the widely held perception that selling involves manipulating others and is not considered a reputable activity. Such attitudes are not favorable for firms that want to recruit students to work in their sales forces (Lysonski and Durvasula 1998).

The marketing literature has consistently reported and discussed students' perceptions of careers in personal selling (Churchill, Ford, and Walker 1990; Swenson et al. 1993). Earlier studies by Paul and Worthing (1970) focused on a cross-section of students regarding their attitudes toward the personal selling career. These authors' claim was that students had a more positive attitude toward personal selling. One of the findings that continued to emerge over time was that college students' perception of the personal selling career was generally negative (Bellenger, Bernhardt, and Wayman 1974; Fossum and Moore 1975; Dubinsky 1980; Swenson et al. 1993).

The purpose of this paper is to explore a 21st century view of personal selling as a career ambition of college students. To develop these perceptions, our study first asks the student to present his/her first, second, and third thoughts about the characteristics of a sales person. Following this question students are asked to respond to some basic questions about the nature of selling and its activities. The study attempts to extract basic attitudes which can be translated into recommendations for company recruiters to integrate into their recruiting strategies.

The paper is organized into six parts. First we review the literature on the topic and propose a conceptual model for the study. Second, we develop the research design and data collection methodology. Third, we present the findings and the analysis of the results. Fourth, we set forth our conclusions. Fifth, we advance our managerial implications. Finally, we outline our study's limitations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over three decades many studies have investigated college students' attitudes on the subject of personal selling as a career choice. While the methodologies have differed for many of these studies, the ultimate conclusions reached have been essentially similar.

Negative images, derived from various portrayals of sales people in books, movies, and other mass media, have been discovered by practitioners and academicians alike (see, e.g., *The American Salesman* 1958; Ditz 1967; Jolson 1972; Paul and Worthing 1970; Thompson 1972). In other research students exhibited a more positive point of view toward sales as a career (Amin et al. 1995;

Dubinsky 1980; Dubinsky and O'Connor 1983; Lagace and Longfellow 1989; Swinyard 1981; Swenson et al. 1993; Weeks and Muelhing 1987). How students view the profession of selling will have an important effect on the sales of all types of companies. Simply put, without sales of products and services a market economy cannot survive. Yet, we do not study very carefully the views and perceptions of potential sales professionals. As companies compete more and more in the global marketplace, sales force diversity becomes more important. Companies need to recruit salespeople to maintain their presence in various markets throughout the world. To address some of these issues, researchers have investigated perceptions of sales careers among students in New Zealand, the Philippines, and other countries in the Pacific Rim (see, e.g., Honeycutt and Thelen 2003; Ford, Honeycutt, and Joseph 1995; Honeycutt et al. 1999; Honeycutt et al. 1996).

Over the years many students have entered the workforce through the sales field. Many of them have become sales managers and have moved into various levels of importance in many wealthy companies. The need for well trained professional sales personnel to sell the products firms offer to the global markets is of major importance. The continuous recruiting process requires companies to seek out sales people who have the capability and desire to find and persuade buyers to consume goods and services (Weeks and Muehling 1987). Honeycutt and Ford (1995) indicated that the educational level of sales candidates is an important factor for companies selecting members of their global sales forces. As such, it is important to know what the students' beliefs and perceptions are regarding this important occupational position in the company. Knowing a student's predisposition up front can eliminate major recruiting difficulties when it becomes times to make a job offer in the future. Knowing students' opinions permits a firm an opportunity to create a message that could persuade or convince the potential candidates that personal selling may have some limitations (Honeycutt and Ford 1995).

Market economies worldwide are driven by the consumption of goods and services. To continue the consumption process we need sales people who are well trained with the skills to adapt to a continuous changing business environment. To achieve this goal and develop a sales force that is capable of producing sustainable revenues, companies visit college and university campuses to enlist potential sales personnel. Unfortunately, corporate recruiters many times find it difficult to persuade students to interview for sales positions let alone offer them a job in this field (Weeks and Muehling 1987). Because the sales profession is held in low regard by the public in general and students in particular, sales managers who are eager to recruit students for sales positions in their company are faced with a major challenge. The problem of the sales profession is one that is important to investigate and

has implications throughout the business community. Efforts have been made to assess the skills needed by the sales profession and thereby adjust curricula to insure that students get the proper training that's needed by the profession (e.g., see Luthy 2006a, 2006b; Sohail and Bradmore 2003; Sojka and Gupta 2000; Dubinsky 1981; Dubinsky and O'Connor 1983).

Better understanding of the attitudes of students regarding personal selling can provide important directions for marketing education. Such information about the attitudes of students can provide opportunities for improving pedagogical approaches in university business programs in order to make careers in selling more attractive (Ford, Honeycutt, and Joseph 1995; Honeycutt et al. 1996; Lupton et al. 1997; Sohail and Bradmore 2003; Luthy 2006a).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Dennis Bristow and his colleagues applied the Marketing Lens Model (MLM) to personal selling careers in two studies published in 2006 (Bristow, Gulati, and Amyx 2006; Bristow et al. 2006). Bristow (1998) developed MLM from the work by Brunswik (1952) on his Lens Model psychological theory. According to Brunswik, the perception of one's environment (in this case, the salesperson) is influenced by one's experiences, expectations, and knowledge.

Meanwhile, Alican Kavas adapted a series of attitudinal statements for use in his study of African-American students' attitudes toward personal selling as a career option (Kavas and Kavas 2002; Kavas 2003). Kavas took 13 attitudinal statements that had been consistently used in research over the past 35–40 years (*The American Salesman* 1958; Paul and Worthing 1970; Dubinsky 1980; Lagace and Longfellow 1989) and added three other statements based on suggestions by Lucas (1996). [These statements will be discussed in more detail under the Methodology section.]

We propose that gender, class standing, and family sales profession history affect the cognitive lens through which students, business, and non-business, perceive the sales profession as a possible career path. Gender differences in particular have been studied by Cook and Hartman (1986) and Muehling and Weeks (1988), among others. African-American students' perceptions have been studied by Kavas and Kavas (2002), Kavas (2003), DeVecchio and Honeycutt (2000, 2002), and Spillan, Totten and Donald (2007). Elements of a sales career (i.e., satisfaction, excitement, career growth, security, challenging) combine with how customer-oriented salespeople are (honesty vs. deceit, focused on the sale vs. focused on the customer) and how others perceive salespeople (prestige, admiration, trustworthiness) to create the attractiveness of the sales profession for a student considering it as a

potential career. Being a business student or not also modifies how one perceives the profession. Perception about the selling profession has broader effects than just on the individual student. Recruiting future sales people is critical for business development and sustainability. If there is a negative perception among students about the selling profession, then such a perspective will eventually affect the stability of our economic well being as an economy. We are a consumption economy which means people must sell and others must buy. If we degrade the selling profession then we can cause problems in the consumption equation which ultimately affects the well being of others. Identifying those factors or elements that relate to the negative beliefs will provide a portal for intervention to allay these negative perceptions, especially in academic curriculums that teach personal selling courses. Redevelopment of course content could have a major impact on resolving the current perceptions that students have of the selling profession. Figure 1 presents a model of how external, internal, and demographic factors are associated with the sales profession and can be an interactive force linked with a student's perception of the job.

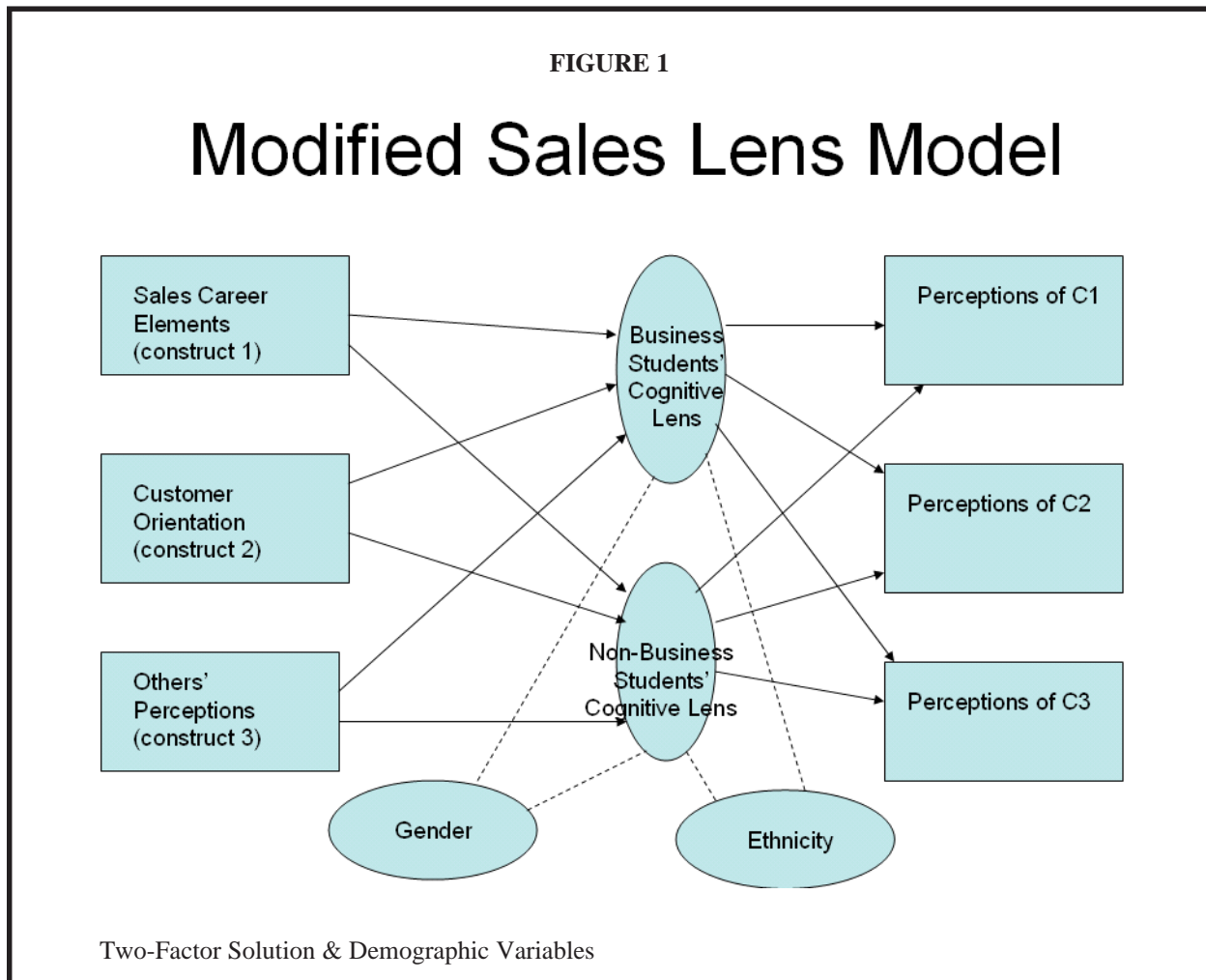
Hypotheses

As we explore and analyze the literature on personal selling we find that there are certain factors that affect the entry into the field of personal selling. Three of those are part of our investigation and have a major impact on decisions regarding whether a student enters the profession of personal selling.

Both men and women are involved in personal selling. Historically, men have been the primary actors in the sales field with women playing a minor role in personal selling. However, over the last 25 years women have begun to make major gains in employment in the sales field (Fugate, Decker, and Brewer 1988). Because of the fact that women have entered the sales field and are being accepted as important human resources in that profession, we posit that:

H₁: There is no significant difference between male and female students and their desire to work in sales.

Having the knowledge and business training necessary to compete in a fast-paced competitive environment is a prerequisite for success in the sales field. Intellectual



agility and the ability to quickly think on one's feet is a major characteristic of a sales person. As such, we believe that:

H₂: There is no significant difference between class standing and the student's desire to work in sales.

The career tradition is strong in many families. Many children's careers follow in the footsteps of their parents or relatives. Numerous examples can be presented where sons and daughters have pursued the same professional sales careers as their mother, father, uncles, or other relative. Therefore, we can say that:

H₃: There is no significant difference between students who have family or relatives who work or did work in sales and those without family members in sales, in their desire to work in sales.

Students who have not studied the history, concepts, and theory of selling may have a different perspective than those who have been exposed to a knowledge base about the selling profession. Such ignorance about the nature of the profession, how it functions and what its characteristics generates negative stereotypes that affect the perceptions of the students. Non-business majors' lack of knowledge about the profession will generate ideas that are not substantiated by research-based information. As such we state that:

H₄: There is no significant difference between business and non-business students in their desire to work in the sales profession.

Selling is a pervasive career which has many dimensions. Gender, class standing, and family relationships are important factors that affect the decisions to enter the profession of personal selling.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Data for this paper was collected from students through a self-administered survey. The first part (Part A) of the survey required the students to state three thoughts that come to mind about sales people (Weeks and Muehling 1987). Next to these thoughts, the students were asked to evaluate these thoughts as positive, neutral, or negative. The second part (Part B) requested that the students indicate whether after graduation they would be interested in selling. The possible answers for this question ranged from definitely would to definitely would not, with probably would, probably would not, and don't know as the intermediate answer possibilities. The third part of the survey consisted of attitudinal statements about personal selling (Paul and Worthing 1970; Dubinsky 1980; Lagrace and Longfellow 1989). The meaning and definition of personal selling was explained in the instruction part of the survey. The students responded to a 16-item scale, which measured attitudes toward personal selling using a five-point Likert type scale with anchors of strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (5). The fourth part of the

survey related to socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, class standing, family sales history, and major). Kavvas (2003) identified these characteristics from his literature review; since we used his survey, we included them as well.

Data was collected at three universities in the U.S.A. These universities were located in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Florida. Students in business classes were asked if they were interested in completing a survey relating to perceptions of personal selling. Instructors of selected classes administered the survey during class time to students present that day. The respondents were able to complete the survey in about 15 minutes. A total of 261 respondents completed the survey.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study was developed in four steps. First we completed a descriptive analysis of the responses associated with each question. The results are found in Table 1. The second step consisted of an independent t test and an ANOVA to determine the relationship between specific variables associated with the selling function. The results of this analysis are revealed in Table 2. The third step involved conducting a factor analysis to determine the major focus of the students' relationship to personal selling. This factor analysis extracted three factors. In other words, it stated that students in this study perceived personal selling from three different perspectives. A second factor analysis forced the extraction of two factors in an effort to improve reliability. These perspectives provided a lens for understanding how they would react to the selling profession as a life-long occupation. Tables 3a and 3b provide the factors, their loadings, the variance explanations, and the Cronbach alpha levels for the questions associated with the factor analyses. Factor solution t tests are provided in Table 4.

The last step consisted of testing the stated hypotheses (Table 5). We wanted to understand the relationship of the student perspective of the selling profession according to gender, class level, business, and non-business student categories. Additionally, we were interested in whether family affiliation with the selling profession had any impact on the student's perception of this occupation.

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1 provides a list of the 16 attitudinal statements used in the survey along with responses. One hundred forty-nine (58%) out of 257 respondents who answered the question were women. Most of the respondents were either juniors (59/256; 23%) or seniors (104/256; 40.6%). A large majority (221/254; 87%) of the students who responded were business majors. Just over three-fifths of the respondents (156/256; 60.9%) indicated that they had family members involved in sales. A marginally signifi-

cant difference was found between class rank and major: non-business majors tended to be freshmen or sophomores ($\chi^2 = 9.338$, $df = 4$, $p = .053$, cell size problem (30%)).

Most of the open-ended thoughts (41.8–44.6%) generated by the respondents were positive, and included comments like “outgoing,” “professional,” “helpful,” and “friendly.” However, roughly a third of the thoughts (31.1–36.3%) were negative and included comments such as “annoying,” “pushy,” “deceitful,” and “arrogant.” Only 31 students (13.7%) out of the 226 who answered the question “definitely would be” interested in a sales job as a career. The mean response was 3.05, indicating “neutral” interest, though the standard deviation, 1.307, was rather large.

As indicated in Table 1, students tended to agree with these perceptions of sales jobs: “low status and low prestige,” “just a job,” “uninteresting/no challenge,” “no need for creativity,” “inappropriate career option,” and “difficult to advance into upper management positions.” Students tended to disagree with these perceptions: “much traveling,” “high pressure forcing people to buy unwanted goods,” and “personality is crucial.” Further analyses of the data were subsequently undertaken and are reported below.

Independent t tests & ANOVA

Three significant differences by gender were revealed through independent t tests (see Table 2a, which also includes Levene’s tests for equality of variances). Men were more interested in obtaining a selling job after graduation (Means: 2.64 vs. 3.31, $p = .000$). Thus, we can reject hypothesis 1. There is a significant difference by gender with respect to interest in a selling job after graduation. Turning to the 16 statements, women tended to agree more with “frustration” (Means: 3.4 vs. 3.15, $p = .048$), whereas men tended to agree more with “salespeople being ‘money hungry’” (Means: 3.4 vs. 3.01, $p = .005$).

One significant difference was found between major and interest in selling career after graduation (see Table 2a). Non-Business majors indicated a definite lack of interest in a selling job after their college years were over with (Means: 3.68 vs. 2.96, $p = .007$); therefore, hypothesis 4 is rejected. Five significant differences were found between family members in sales and perceptions of personal selling (see Table 2a). Students with family members in the sales field tended to disagree more with “Just a job” (2.34 vs. 2.94, $p = .000$), “Too little monetary reward” (2.42 vs. 2.69, $p = .026$), and “Difficult to

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE 16 ATTITUDINAL STATEMENTS

Statements	Mean*	SD	Median	Mode	N
I associate a job in personal selling with:					
Frustration	3.29	1.005	3	4	260
Insincerity and deceit	2.88	1.111	3	3	259
Low status and low prestige	2.34	0.940	2	2	259
Much traveling	3.53	0.999	4	4	260
Salespeople being “money hungry”	3.19	1.097	3	4	259
Low job security	3.08	1.128	3	3	259
High pressure forcing people to buy unwanted goods	3.49	1.106	4	4	260
“Just a job” not a “career”	2.58	1.128	2	2	260
Uninteresting/no challenge	1.95	0.976	2	2	261
No need for creativity	1.89	0.996	2	2	259
Personality is crucial	4.43	0.882	5	5	257
Too little monetary reward	2.53	0.922	3	3	258
Interferes with home life	3.17	1.010	3	3	261
“Easy to get” job	2.82	0.868	3	3	261
Inappropriate career option	2.42	0.928	2	2	260
Difficult to advance into upper management positions	2.61	0.994	2	2	260

*Five-point rating scale where 1 = “Strongly Disagree” and 5 = “Strongly Agree.”

**TABLE 2A
SIGNIFICANT INDEPENDENT T TESTS**

Items Group Variable	Levene's Test		Independent t Test			
	F (Sig.)	t Value	Df	Sig.	Mean (M)	Mean (F)
Gender						
Interest in Career+	1.044 (NS)	-3.802	222	0.000	2.64	3.31
Frustration	2.445 (NS)	-1.991	254	0.048	3.15	3.40
Money Hungry	1.922 (NS)	2.806	253	0.005	3.40	3.01
Group Variable						
Major						
Interest in Career+	0.015 (NS)	-2.745	220	0.007	2.96	3.96
Group Variable						
Family Sales History						
High Pressure	3.790 (NS)	-3.441	253	0.001	3.31	3.79
Just a Job	3.421 (NS)	-4.278	253	0.000	2.34	2.94
Personality	6.838 (0.009)	3.108	176.798	0.003	4.58	4.24
Too Little Money	2.459 (NS)	-2.243	251	0.026	2.42	2.69
Advancing	0.118 (NS)	-3.052	253	0.003	2.46	2.85

+ Scale: 1 = "Definitely *would* like"; all others use scale: 1 = "Strongly Disagree."

**TABLE 2B
CLASS RANK (ANOVA)**

Statement	F Value	Df	Sig.	Mean Differences
Insincerity/Deceit	3.229	4/249	0.013	2.45 (Sophomores) vs. 3.29 (Grad. Students)
Personality	4.319	4/247	0.002	3.96 (Freshmen) vs. 4.51 to 4.64 (Juniors, Seniors, Grad. Students)
"Easy to get job"	3.565	4/251	0.008	2.48 (Sophomores) vs. 3.24 (Grad. Students)

Note: Homogeneity of variance tests were not significant for all statements above; Scale is 1 = "Strongly Disagree" and 5 = "Strongly Agree."

advance into upper management positions" (2.46 vs. 2.85, $p = .003$), and tended to agree more with "Personality is crucial" (4.58 vs. 4.24, $p = .003$). Respondents without any family members involved in sales tended to agree more with "High pressure forcing people to buy unwanted goods" (3.79 vs. 3.31, $p = .001$).

Three significant differences were uncovered using analysis of variance with respect to class rank and percep-

tions of personal selling (see Table 2b). Sophomores tended to disagree more with "Insincerity and deceit" (2.45 vs. 3.29 for Graduate students, $p = .013$) and "Easy to get" job (2.48 vs. 3.24 for Graduate students, $p = .008$). Juniors, Seniors, and Graduate students tended to strongly agree that "Personality is crucial" (means > 4.5 vs. 3.96 for Freshmen, $p = .002$). The homogeneity of variance tests was not significant for each of the three variables.

The sixteen items in Kavass' scale were subjected to principal components analysis (PCA) using SPSS version 14. Prior to performing PCA the suitability of data for factor analysis was assessed. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients of 0.30 and above. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy value was .855, exceeding the recommended value of .6 (Pallant 2005, p. 182). In addition, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at $p = .000$; therefore, factor analysis was supported.

Principal components analysis resulted in the extraction of three factors initially, all with eigenvalues greater than 1, and explaining 30.8 percent, 11.4 percent, and 7.1 percent of the variance respectively. An inspection of the scree plot supported the presence of three components. Both Varimax and Direct Oblimin rotations were performed, with no observable differences in factor solutions. A Varimax rotation set to produce three factors was then performed. Three factors were defined that explained 49.3 percent of the variance, though no simple structure was achieved by the rotation. Table 3a sets forth the specific description of these factors and their loading values.

While the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient for the first component, Negative Stereotype of Salespeople, was very good at .816, the coefficients for the other two components were below the acceptable .7 level (Pallant 2005, p. 92). Factor 2, Dead-End Job, had a coefficient of .604, and factor 3, Work-Family Conflict, had a coefficient of .424. The reliability test recommended that the item, "Personality is crucial," which loaded negatively, be dropped. Doing so raised factor 2's coefficient alphas to .729. However, the weakness of factor 3 had to be addressed.

Principal components analysis of the original sixteen items, using a Varimax rotation and forcing a two-factor solution, yielded a lower overall percentage of variance explanation (42.228%) but higher reliability coefficient alphas of .772 and .739. The personality item once again was isolated for dropping; the resulting factor analysis of 15 items for a forced two-factor solution produced an overall variance explanation of 43.697 percent and coefficient alphas of .801 (factor 1) and .772 (factor 2). Please see Table 3b for the two-factor solution.

Even though the selling career presents different opportunities to earn high levels of income, there remains

**TABLE 3A
THREE-FACTOR ANALYSIS RESULTS**

Factor Descriptions	Loading	Variance %
Factor 1 – Negative Stereotype of Salespeople		
Insincerity and deceit	.804	30.789
High pressure forcing people to buy unwanted goods	.651	
Salespeople being "money hungry"	.640	
Frustration	.601	
Inappropriate career option	.529	
Low status and low prestige	.523	
"Easy to get" job	.497	
Low job security	.478	
Factor 2 – Dead-End Job		
Uninteresting/no challenge	.679	11.438
No need for creativity	.636	
Too little monetary reward	.583	
Difficult to advance into upper management	.563	
"Just a job" not a career	.543	
Personality crucial	-.533	
Factor 3 – Work-Family Conflict		
Interferes with home life	.727	7.072
Much traveling	.646	
Total Variance explained by three factors		49.300 %

TABLE 3B
TWO-FACTOR ANALYSIS RESULTS

Factor Descriptions	Loading	Variance %	Cronbach's Alpha
Factor 1: Dead-End Job			
Uninteresting/no challenge	.781	32.783	.801
“Just a job” not a career	.683		
No need for creativity	.632		
Inappropriate career option	.619		
Too little monetary reward	.601		
Low status and low prestige	.598		
Difficult to advance into upper management	.537		
“Easy to get” job	.452		
Factor 2: Negative Stereotype of Salespeople		10.915	.772
Salespeople being “money hungry”	.677		
High pressure forcing people to buy unwanted goods	.671		
Frustration	.623		
Insincerity and deceit	.622		
Low job security	.612		
Much traveling	.566		
Interferes with home life	.511		
Total Variance explained by two factors		43.697%	

among students the notion that selling is a dead end job; that it is perceived by the public as a negative profession and that it creates family conflict because of the long hours and travel that is involved in this non-traditional work schedule.

The two components resulting from the factor analysis of the 15 items were subsequently analyzed by means of ANOVA and independent t tests to determine if there were any significant differences among the demographic variables. First, new variables representing factor-based scales were created by summing the unstandardized item scores for each of the two factors, Dead-End Job (factor 1) and Negative Stereotypes of Salespeople (factor 2) (see Pett et al. 2003, p. 222). Independent t tests were run against each factor for gender, major, and family in sales. One analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run against each factor for class standing. No significant differences were found between gender and each factor, and between major (business vs. non-business) and each factor. No significant differences were found among class standing and each factor. Only one significant difference and one marginally significant difference were discovered, as indicated in Table 4 below. Those students with some

family member involved in the sales field tended to disagree that selling is a “dead-end job” ($t = -3.292, p = .001$, mean summated score for family (yes) = 18.22 vs. 20.3). Those students who did not have family members involved in the sales field tended to agree that “negative stereotypes” of salespeople exist ($t = -1.838, p = .067$, mean summated score for family (no) = 23.21 vs. 22.06).

The results of this analysis indicated that women believe that sales profession is a dead-end job more than men believed this idea. Both males and females think that the sales profession has a negative perception among the public. Moreover both men and women believe that the sales profession creates family conflict. Overall H_1 is not supported. With regard to the differences between business and non-business students, we found that a significant relationship does not exist between the two groups and thus we can state that H_4 is rejected.

While students who had a family member working in the sales profession had more positive opinions in general of selling as a career, they did not differ significantly in their desire from those without family members in sales; thus we must say that H_3 is not rejected. Finally, we can say that there are some significant differences between and

among the upper classmen and the lower classmen in their opinions of selling as a career; however, there was no difference in desire to enter professional selling careers. Thus, we must say that H_2 is not rejected.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study have demonstrated that the overall sales career perception scale is a valid and reliable measure of students' ideas of sales as a career. We know that different people have different perceptions of sales as a professional career. We have demonstrated in this study that there are different perceptions among students, the potential sales people of the future, and who they are as individuals. Specifically we found out that there was no significant difference in male or female students' perception of the profession. That is an important finding because it means that both genders believe essentially that the same ideas exist among professionals in the selling field. However, there was a significant difference in desire to enter the sales career field, with men exhibiting a stronger desire than women.

With regard to class standing and perception of the sales field, we found that there were differences between

and among the class standings. While there was no major differences over all, there were specific differences in perceptions on ideas such as insincerity, deception, personality, and easy to get a job. Three of these variables are critical to the success for any sales person, yet we find significant differences among the students in each class. This may be caused by the maturing factor meaning that as they learn more and their perceptions refine, they have a more solid positive perspective on the issue.

Students who have family members affiliated with the sales profession also had some major difference in opinion on several factors (see Table 2). This suggests that the influence of selling from ideas about the job presented in the family discussions may have affected their thinking about this profession. Also, non-business majors were less likely to find the sales field desirable as a career option.

IMPLICATIONS

There are major implications for the educator and sales professional recruiters. From the education and training point of view, it is necessary for educators and trainers to set specific goals regarding an area of sales

**TABLE 4
FACTOR SOLUTION T TESTS**

Factor	Family in Sales	F*	Sig.*	t-value	Df	Sig.	N	Mean
Dead-End Job	Yes	.014	.907	-3.292	254	.001	156	18.2179
	No						100	20.3000
Negative Stereotype of Salespeople	Yes	.520	.471	-1.838	254	.067	156	22.0641
	No						100	23.2100

*Levene's Test for Equality of Variances; variances are equal.

**TABLE 5
HYPOTHESES RESULTS**

H_1	There is no significant difference between male and female students and their desire to work in sales	Rejected
H_2	There is no significant difference between class standing and the student's desire to work in sales	Not rejected
H_3	There is no significant difference between students who have family or relatives who work or did work in sales and those without family members in sales in their desire to work in sales	Not rejected
H_4	There is no significant difference between business and non-business students in their desire to work in the sales profession	Rejected

training that are important to success in the sales field. Specifically, sales professional training needs to focus on:

- a. Improving communication skills. Oral communication is so critical to the business field and to the sales field especially, yet very few business programs promote this form of communication as a necessary and important part of the curriculum. Oral communication does not have the stature in business programs as does strategy, marketing, or accounting. Sales careers are fundamentally communication careers using business skills, hence it is critical for schools to begin to emphasize oral communication;
- b. Preparing potential sales professionals for success or dealing with ethical situations. Making sure that sales professionals are problem solvers with the needs of the customer in mind as a primary concern of the sales job. Deviations through paths that focus solely on making the sale without meeting the customer's needs will lead to doom for any professional sales person. Students must learn early that sales ethics are an important part of the sales persons job;
- c. Providing simulations and role playing exercises in students' sales and marketing course work that demonstrates the value and the importance of the sales profession would be valuable in dispelling the negative myths that many students have;
- d. Providing domestic and international sales and marketing internships that actually furnish "hands-on" introduction to the field of sales. This is an important way for students to really see the positives and negatives of the profession;
- e. Introduce students to sales professionals by having these experienced sales people speak in sales classes each semester. Having a sales professional share his/her ideas and experiences can go a long way toward developing a realistic perspective for students.
- f. Have students participate in the Pi Sigma Epsilon Pro-Am Sell-a-Thon which teaches participating students sales skills, and acquaints stu-

dents with the sales profession and the sales executives (Devine 2005).

In the business world nothing happens until the sale is made. That is how important selling is to business. Those sales professionals who make the sales are at the forefront of business. The sales they generate become the life blood of a business. Preparing good sales people is essential for the survival of good business and economic growth. Educators and sales professional recruiters have an obligation to understand the perceptions of students interested in the profession so that they can develop appropriate innovative ways to train and recruit high quality sales professionals to their companies.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

One major limitation of this study is that it was conducted at only three universities. Such a small selection of schools does not allow for diversity or a broader range of ideas about sales career perceptions. Another limitation is the fact that most of the students surveyed were business students. Surveying more non-business majors may provide a sharper and more delineated indication of what the real perceptions are of divergent groups. As noted by the reviewers, our initial three-factor solution explained less than 50 percent of the variance in the data. Even after subsequent analysis and a two-factor solution, the proportion of variance explained remained under 50 percent. This is another limitation of the study. Nevertheless, a number of areas for future research are suggested based on the above findings. First, conduct focus groups and/or surveys of students whose parents are in sales, in an effort to better understand the perceptions and knowledge about the field that is shared across generations. Second, purposely include a more diverse population of students in a replication of this study. This may involve research at largely ethnic minority colleges and universities like traditionally African-American universities, or at universities that have significant ethnic minorities among their student bodies. Third, broaden the population to include more international students, in order to assess their perceptions.

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