Generation Y and career choice
The impact of retail career perceptions, expectations and entitlement perceptions

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Abstract
Purpose – The transition from higher education to employment is a major life change for many college seniors (currently, the Generation Y cohort). The purpose of this paper is to enhance the understanding of Generation Y and to present new insights regarding Gen Y’s retail career expectations, perceptions of retail careers, future psychological contract/entitlement perceptions of retail careers, and career exploration of the US retailing industry.

Design/methodology/approach – Utilizing quantitative research methods via an on-line survey, the authors examined 193 Gen Y college seniors’ retail career perceptions and expectations, and explored the influence these factors have on future psychological contract/entitlement perceptions of employer-employee obligations and retail career exploration from nine US universities.

Findings – College seniors’ pre-entry retail job expectations, perceptions of retail careers, and future psychological contract/entitlement perceptions of employee obligations were significant predictors of career exploration; college seniors’ preconceived notions of retail careers, combined with what they feel they would owe their future employer, are instrumental in determining retail career exploration decisions.

Research limitations/implications – Findings suggest directions for university faculty, academic advisors, and industry practitioners on facilitating college seniors’ transitions from higher education to the world of work by suggesting recruitment strategies that can attract, retain and motivate Gen Y.

Originality/value – The findings provide useful criteria for organizational development strategies to assist with the transition from higher education to the workforce and may also improve the success of recruiting Gen Y employees. In addition, the conceptualization of psychological contracts (i.e. entitlement perceptions) differentiates this study from prior psychological contract research.

Keywords Retailing, Perceptions, Careers, United States of America

Paper type Research paper

Introduction
The retail industry is one of the largest employers in the USA (Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 2008-2009). In an industry that has approximately 4.4 million employees, retailers face the continual challenge of attracting, recruiting and retaining a competent workforce (Knight et al., 2006). This challenge is magnified by the prediction that the retail workforce is expected to increase by 7 percent between 2006 and 2016 (Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 2008-2009).
Compounding the problem is the fact that employee turnover in retailing continues to grow. According to the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) (2007) the retail industry’s voluntary turnover rate of 34.7 percent is one of the highest of any industry. One reason retail employment has higher turnover rates than other industries, is that by nature, they are boundary-spanning positions; they require a great deal of interaction beyond their own department or company. Retail management positions must interact with numerous contacts including vendors, media executives, supervisors, sales personnel, corporate executive, and customers. Communicating with those diverse constituents often leads to high levels of role conflict and ambiguity, which often result in turnover (Kahn et al., 1964). Additionally, both the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) (2006) and the Employment Policy Foundation (EPC) (2005) report that turnover rates are usually higher for industries that employ a younger-than-average workforce, like retailing. Many of these younger employees are employed part-time while they are finishing their college degree, and as a result, often develop negative perceptions of retail careers (Broadbridge et al., 2007; Knight et al., 2006; Broadbridge, 2003a).

Swinyard (1981) and Swinyard et al. (1991) confirmed the negative perceptions of retail careers among college students enrolled in marketing courses. Even though students who took retail courses described retail careers more positively than those who did not, over time, even those students stated that retail careers were less appealing than other business-related careers (e.g. finance, accounting). This may explain why college students who have completed a retail-related degree and have retail work experience often choose not to pursue a career in retailing. Broadbridge (2003b) found that students with retail work experience were three times more likely to affirm they would not choose a career in retailing, compared to those with no retail work experience. Thus, a great deal of misunderstanding about careers in retailing can be attributed to previous job experiences (Broadbridge, 2003a).

Competition is keen for the brightest candidates in the talent pool; therefore, our research seeks a deeper understanding of the following research questions: What perceptions and expectations of retailing as a career option are held by Generation Y college graduates and how can we increase the likelihood of attracting high quality candidates for retail careers? Since college students often form their perceptions and expectations based on previous job experiences, retailers are clearly missing an opportunity to convey to their part-time employees/students the benefits of a long-term career in the retail industry. In addition academicians seek ways to provide realistic expectations for the transition from school to work, for the next generation (i.e. Generation Y).

**Aims of the current study**
To identify new insights regarding Generation Y’s retail career expectations and perceptions, to better prepare Generation Y for the transition from higher education to the world of work, and to enhance our understanding of this generation, our research focuses on graduating college seniors who fall within the birth date range of Generation Y cohorts (1980-2003). Our model (see Figure 1) presents the variables we examine, which include: pre-entry retail job expectations, perceptions of retail careers, supervisory support, future psychological contract/entitlement perceptions of employer-employee obligations, and career exploration. Understanding the
relationships between these variables is important for educators as they prepare students for retail careers; by helping students formulate career expectations and by increasing the accuracy of student perceptions, job fit is more likely (Backhaus, 2003). In addition, educators and practitioners can determine why some students who prepare for retail-related careers choose to leave a company before they have established themselves and their career.

To explain how we arrived at our model, we begin by reviewing the literature on career transition phases, followed by an examination of the characteristics of Generation Y. Then we provide a brief review of literature relevant to the constructs presented in the path model (see Figure 1) and use the model as a framework to propose hypotheses.

**Career transition phases: from academia to full-time employment**

The transition from college to the world of work is a major life change for many college seniors, during which they face the complex demands of the economy; of a challenging, highly competitive job market; and of an increasingly diverse population and work-force. The transition from higher education into employment warrants particular attention because it represents a critical threshold between adolescence and adulthood.

Students invest a great deal of their time, energy, and resources in obtaining a higher education degree; hence, they have high expectations regarding their future careers and employment status (Wood, 2004). However, as Keenan and Newton (1984) stated, it is common for graduates to have negative reactions to their initial post-college employment, partly due to inflated expectations (often fostered during recruitment). To bridge the transition gap, it is important to gain a clearer understanding of student career expectations and perceptions, and the influence these have on career choice.

Career transition from higher education to employment consists of three phases: preparation/anticipation, encounter, and adjustment/stabilization (Nicholson and Arnold, 1989). The preparation/anticipation phase relates to readiness for change and steps that can be taken to help prepare for such change. The encounter phase deals with the shocks and surprises of new circumstances or demands and identifies the necessary coping mechanisms. The adjustment/stabilization phase involves the
challenge of evaluating and minimizing any misfit between person and situation, either by changing to absorb the new demands, or by preparing for the next work-role transition. Although it is important for educators to prepare students for their future career prior to this work-role transition, it is equally important for employers to ensure that this transition is smooth through all three phases.

For retail-related careers, the transition process is often complex. In addition to being boundary spanners, to perform at expected levels, these entry-level employees must possess a high level of confidence in their competence to achieve peak performance across a range of tasks. Research suggests that supervisory support (e.g. appreciation, consideration, feedback) plays a vital role in reducing role stress (Wolken and Good, 1995), increasing job satisfaction (Dubinsky and Skinner, 1984), and enhancing employee recruitment and retention (Babin and Boles, 1996).

Furthermore, employers face great challenges in gaining the commitment of younger and first-time (i.e. entry-level) employees. Employees bring to the workplace their own set of values and expectations. Therefore, employers that adjust their human resource strategies to be more flexible and potentially accommodating to employee values, will more likely attract available talent, and ultimately become the workplace of choice (Lowe and Schellenberg, 2002). To adjust their strategies, employers must recognize and, ideally, accommodate generational differences that may distinguish individuals they have hired in the past from the new labor pool.

**Characteristics of the next generation of new hires: Generation Y**

College recruiters continually monitor generational cohorts to identify changes that are necessary to maximize the likelihood that they employ recruitment strategies that will give them a competitive advantage. The next wave of employees to transition into the workforce will be graduating college seniors, the majority of which fit into the category of “Generation Y” (birth date range: 1980-2003). Generation Y is estimated as 76 million Americans, or 15 percent of the current workforce (Eisner, 2005). Generation Y was raised in a time of economic expansion and prosperity, and is maturing in an era of economic uncertainty and increased violence; about 16 percent of Generation Y grew up or is growing up in poverty (Raines, 2002). Because Generation Y has seen more hardships and tragedies at an earlier age than prior generations (e.g. Columbine, 9/11, the Iraq war, Hurricane Katrina; Sujansky, 2004), they reflect some values held by “Greatest generation” (birth date range: 1925-1945).

Like the “Greatest generation”, Generation Y has a strong sense of morality, tends to be patriotic, is willing to fight for freedom, is sociable, and values home and family. Generation Y tends to want an intellectual challenge, needs to succeed, strives to make a difference, and seeks employers who will further their professional development (Brown, 2004). Setting and achieving personal goals matters to Generation Y cohorts, as does performing meaningful work that has the potential to contribute to a better world. Making a great deal of money appears to be less of a motivator for this generation, whereas contributing to society, parenting well, and enjoying a fulfilled and balanced life appears to be more motivating (Allen, 2004).

The Generation Y cohort is accustomed to being active in family decisions. Thus, they are more likely to expect a similar amount of authority or ability to contribute to decisions in employer organizations (Johns, 2003). In the workplace, Generation Y
favors an inclusive style of management; they tend to dislike slowness, and desire immediate feedback about their performance (Francis-Smith, 2004).

This globally aware, socially conscious, and volunteer-minded generation is likely to perform best when their abilities are identified and matched with challenging work that encourages them to reach their full potential (Martin and Tulgan, 2006). Those individuals who experienced high levels of mentoring and support in high school and college may be surprised by the lack of personalized attention and mentoring at work, which may make their transition from full-time student to full-time employee much more difficult. These new workforce entrants will seek more personal attention, require high levels of supervision, and expect more structure than their Generation X predecessors (Zemke et al., 2000).

The limited empirical work that compares generations does so in the context of strategically managing multiple generations within a company and there is lack of consensus regarding whether generational differences impact workplace attitudes and behaviors (Sullivan et al., 2009). However, our study examines a generational cohort (i.e. Gen Y) from the recruitment perspective and we found no studies attempting that focus.

Related literature, proposed path model, and hypothesis development

Pre-entry retail job expectations

Prior to starting any job, potential employees form expectations of what the job will be like. This anticipation of what will happen is preconceived, based on existing work and life experiences, career aspirations and dreams, and personal characteristics (Woods, 1993). Research shows that when work experiences parallel career expectations, employees are more satisfied with their jobs and career choices (Igbaria et al., 1991). To gain further insight into the factors that influence career choices, it is important to understand the relationship that pre-entry expectations play in the career decision-making process. If retailers had a more concrete understanding of what Generation Y college seniors expect in their retail-related careers, they may be able to minimize the gap between met and un-met expectations, and curtail the negative perceptions (e.g. low pay, long hours, dead-end jobs, inflexible schedules) often associated with a career in a service industry such as retailing (Knight and Crutsinger, 2003).

College seniors today have well-formulated expectations regarding retail careers (Knight et al., 2006). In a study regarding retail work experience and industry expectations, Knight and Crutsinger (2003) found that those college graduates who were planning to pursue a career in retailing, and who were currently employed in retail stores (at least part-time) expected enjoyable work, a sense of accomplishment, good pay, and opportunities to develop new skills.

Future supervisory support expectations

One specific type of pre-entry expectation is the role of the supervisor. Supervisory support is the degree to which employees perceive that their supervisor will provide direction, encouragement, and mentoring. During college, many students are employed in part-time retail jobs that provide minimal supervision, leaving them without role models to provide direction and to promote the development of positive and valuable work traits and habits (Schneider and Stevenson, 1999). Lack of proper supervisory
support can result in an untrained, unmotivated workforce, and is a potential cause of increased absenteeism, low morale, poor customer service, and increased employee turnover (Knight and Crutsinger, 2003). Conversely, a workplace with high levels of supervisory support can positively impact job performance, job satisfaction, and intent to stay (Hom and Kinicki, 2001).

New hires inevitably experience many ambiguities and conflicts regarding their job duties, co-workers, and supervisors. In their study of 261 full-time food service workers, Babin and Boles (1996) found that increased perceptions of supervisory support reduced employee role conflict and role ambiguity, and increased job satisfaction. In addition, Jamrog (2002) found that the supervisor was the key influence on whether or not young employees remained with the company. Thus, supervisory support is critical because employees value workplace support (Ray and Miller, 1991).

According to focus group research, college students often related positive part-time work experiences with supervisors who were professional and knowledgeable (Knight and Crutsinger, 2003). Conversely, students who had negative work experiences and were not considering a career in retailing often mentioned that supervisors were unprofessional and lacked managerial training. This implies that to be satisfied with a retail career, college students expect their supervisors to be professional, knowledgeable, respectful, and supportive. These preconceived expectations regarding supervisory support will inevitably contribute to future job entitlement perceptions, especially regarding what students feel they owe their future employer and what their future employer owes them.

Perceptions of retail careers
Swinyard (1981) was the first scholar to research the appeal of retailing as a career and his work is a benchmark for future comparisons (Broadbridge, 2001, 2003a; Commins and Preston, 1997; Swinyard et al., 1991). Swinyard’s results confirmed that a negative perception of retailing as a career prevails (Rhoads et al., 2002; Swinyard, 1981; Swinyard et al., 1991). Often, students’ perceptions of retailing as a future career are based solely on their experiences as consumers or part-time employees (Broadbridge, 2003b). Moreover, research suggests that students do not fully understand what a job in retailing entails (Broadbridge, 2003b; Commins and Preston, 1997; Swinyard, 1981; Swinyard et al., 1991). According to Swinyard (1981) and Foresight (2001), perceptions of retail careers appear to also be influenced by a company’s image and type of retail sector, with some sectors (i.e. department stores; specialty and designer boutiques) more highly rated by students as preferred career destinations than others (i.e. grocery, home improvement and other do-it-yourself sectors).

Furthermore, many young people accept or reject a particular career based on personal work experience or part-time employment (Hodkinson, 1995). Regardless of students’ reasons for working in the retail sector, their perceptions of these experiences will be essential in determining the appeal of retailing as a potential future career. Retailers must be able to attract, recruit, and retain a skilled workforce to successfully compete in the twenty-first century marketplace, yet many retailers face major obstacles in recruiting talented college graduates due to negative perceptions (Swinyard, 1981; Swinyard et al., 1991). Additionally, Broadbridge (2003b) stated that personal work experiences could either help strengthen or attenuate positive perceptions of choosing retailing as a career. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

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College seniors’ pre-entry retail job expectations will have a positive impact on their: perceptions of retail careers; and future supervisory support expectations.

*Future psychological contracts: entitlement perceptions of employee–employer obligations*

Psychological contracts relate to individuals’ beliefs in a mutual obligation between themselves and another party (e.g. an employer or supervisor). These contracts develop when individuals presume promises (e.g. employment opportunities or promotions), the presumption of which causes them to believe in the existence of a reciprocal obligation between them and the other party (e.g. accepting an employment offer or a promotion; Rousseau, 2000). In other words, psychological contracts are beliefs about what individuals feel they owe their employer; these beliefs develop via an interactive process that often begins during the recruitment process (Rousseau, 1990).

Our conceptualization of psychological contracts differentiates our study from prior psychological contract research in two major respects. First, because the college students in our study have not yet begun their first full-time jobs post-graduation, we conceptualize their psychological contract perceptions to be equivalent to their entitlement perceptions of employer–employee obligations. According to organizational psychologist Ben Dattner (iSixSigma, 2003), the phenomenon of employee entitlement can be traced back to a faulty psychological contract between the organization and the employee. Entitlement is a “perceived right to demand” that can manifest in various ways, such as employees who expect bonuses for accomplishing simply the basics outlined in the job description, or employees who fail to meet sales goals, but demand bonuses anyway. As a result, privileges become rights, and perks lose their power to motivate and improve performance (Wellner, 2004). Using this logic, entitlement perceptions act as a surrogate for psychological contracts. Entitlement perceptions of employer obligations captures the essence of what college seniors feel their employer would owe them, and entitlement perceptions of employee obligations captures what they feel they would owe their employer.

Second, as previously stated, pre-entry expectations are based on prior experiences. Therefore, college graduates take preconceived expectations to their first post-graduation job. And, because these pre-entry expectations contribute to their entitlement perceptions, we conceptualize pre-entry expectations to be an antecedent of entitlement perceptions (see Figure 1). As newcomers become socialized into the organization and their current experiences replace expectations, the influence of their pre-entry expectations is assumed to diminish (Sutton and Griffin, 2004). To more fully understand how new hires revise their psychological contracts over time, it is important to first consider the entitlement perceptions of potential new hires prior to starting their first full-time jobs. Therefore, to broaden our knowledge of how retailers can acquire quality employees from among college seniors, it is necessary to examine entitlement perceptions and the relationship they have with pre-entry expectations, future supervisory support expectations, and career exploration. We propose the following hypotheses:

*H2. College seniors’ pre-entry retail job expectations; future supervisory support expectations; and perceptions of retail careers will have a positive impact on their entitlement perceptions of employer obligations.*
H3. College seniors' pre-entry retail job expectations; future supervisory support expectations; and perceptions of retail careers will have a positive impact on their entitlement perceptions of employee obligations.

Career exploration
Career exploration is “the process of generating and assimilating career information relating to self and the world of work” (Atkinson and Murrell, 1988, p. 374), and is a pivotal element in any career-related decision-making process (Jepsen and Dilly, 1974; Thoreson and Ewart, 1976). Individuals typically obtain career information through self-exploration of values, interests, skill strengths and weaknesses, and environment exploration (Noe, 1996). Thus, it is important for individuals to recognize how their own personal values, wants, needs and interests could influence future career choices.

Furthermore, to gain a more comprehensive exploration of the self and world of work, it is important for individuals to seek career-related information and try different work roles to form personal experiences regarding potential careers. This career exploration process helps individuals generate an appropriate quantity or quality of information, on which a sound career decision can be made (Atkinson and Murrell, 1988). Individuals who gather and use career-related information to assist in their career decision-making process are more likely to choose a suitable career (Osipow, 1983). In addition, career exploration is expected to occur in persons who wish to successfully advance in their careers (Phillips, 1982).

In sum, career exploration results in increased knowledge of career opportunities and a greater awareness of what skills and behaviors are necessary for career success (Noe, 1996). Consequently, we posit that information and experiences gathered by college seniors via the career exploration process will be influenced by their expectations and perceptions regarding a particular career (retailing). Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H4. College seniors' pre-entry retail job expectations; perceptions of retail careers; entitlement perceptions of employer obligations; and entitlement perceptions of employee obligations will have a positive impact on their career exploration.

Proposed path model and theoretical frameworks
The proposed path model (see Figure 1) was created using theoretical groundwork from psychological contract theory (Rousseau, 2000) and organizational commitment theory (Steers, 1977). The proposed path model is intended for use with college seniors completing retail-related academic programs, formulating career expectations, and making career decisions. Prior research examines the relationships between work experience, career expectations, career intentions, job satisfaction, and job outcomes (Babin and Boles, 1996; Igbaria et al., 1994; Knight et al., 2006). However, few research studies investigate the holistic relationship that incorporates college students' pre-entry job expectations and their perceptions of future job obligations. We found no studies that analyze the relationships among college students' pre-entry job expectations, future supervisory support expectations, perceptions of retail careers, entitlement perceptions of employer/employee obligations, and career exploration.
Method
We tested our hypotheses with college seniors enrolled in retail-related majors from nine different colleges/universities across the USA. Each institution has a retail-related major (e.g. merchandising, retailing) and a faculty colleague, able to assist in data collection.

Pretest
We conducted a pretest by surveying 65 college students enrolled in a senior-level retailing course at a large Northeastern university. Feedback from the pretest respondents allowed us to test the reliability and content validity of the survey instrument. After making necessary modifications to the survey instrument, we converted it to an online survey database.

Procedure
Three of the nine participating universities requested hard copies of the survey instrument and consent form (rather than utilizing the online survey method). Colleagues from the remaining six universities forwarded a consent form via email to all of their seniors in the appropriate majors. The consent form explained the study and included a web link for students willing to participate in the online survey. To maximize our response rate, we sent a reminder email to participating colleagues one month after the initial email, asking colleagues to forward the consent with web survey link one final time.

Participants
A total of 224 useable responses were obtained; 29 participants were excluded because they did not meet the criterion of being a college senior, and two participants were excluded due to incomplete surveys. The final sample consisted of 193 participants ranging in age from 20 to 32, with an average age of 22 (SD = 1.67). The participants were 19.2 percent male and 80.8 percent female. Approximately 49 percent of the participants were currently working in retail; of those, 70 percent worked 11-29 hours per week. Almost 50 percent of the participants worked with their employer for less than a year and 34 percent worked for their employer for two to three years.

Measures
Pre-entry retail job expectations. In total, 14 items measured pre-entry retail job expectations. The scale responses ranged from 1 to 5 (1 = not important, 5 = very important), with a coefficient alpha of 0.83, and included statements like: “Opportunities to make a contribution to society”, “Work-related travel”, “Opportunities for leadership”, “Work-family balance”, and “Opportunities to learn new things”.

Perceptions of retail careers. In total, 21 items asked respondents to report perceptions of retail careers (Knight and Crutsinger, 2003). Responses were measured on a 1 to 5 scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), and yielded a coefficient alpha of 0.87. The scale included items such as: “Retail work is enjoyable”, “Retail jobs offer good pay”, “Retail work provides job stability”, “Retail work has a well-defined career path”, “Retail work is a prestigious career”, “Retail work includes long-hours”, and “Working in retail is worthwhile”.

Future supervisory support expectations. Six items measured future supervisory support expectations (Wolken and Good, 1995). Items were measured on a 1 to 7 scale
Because these college seniors had not yet begun their post-college career, they were asked to respond to the statements based on what they felt their future supervisory support should be. Sample statements included: “My supervisor should go out of his/her way to make my life easier for me”, “It should be easy to talk with my supervisor”, and “My supervisor should appreciate the work I do”.

*Future psychological contracts: entitlement perceptions of employer obligations.* Nine items measured future psychological contracts: entitlement perceptions of employer obligations (Rousseau, 1990). Item measures were scaled 1 to 5 (1 = not at all obligated, 5 = very obligated), yielding a coefficient alpha of 0.73, and included statements like: “Promotion and advancement”, “Pay based on current level or performance”, “Long-term job stability”, and “Career development”.

*Future psychological contracts: entitlement perceptions of employee obligations.* Eight items measured future psychological contracts: entitlement perceptions of employee obligations (Rousseau, 1990). Item responses were scaled 1 to 5 (1 = not at all obligated, 5 = very obligated), yielding a coefficient alpha of .69, and included statements such as: “Working extra hours”, “Loyalty”, and “Volunteering to do non-required tasks on the job”.

*Career exploration.* Four items adapted from Stumpf et al.’s (1983) career exploration survey measured the extent to which respondents explored various career options before deciding on a career in retailing. Scale items ranged from 1 to 5 (1 = very small extent, 5 = very large extent). Pre-test results yielded a coefficient alpha of 0.67. After modifying and refining these items based on pre-test results and adding two additional items explicitly referring to retail-related careers, we used six items, yielding an improved coefficient alpha of 0.78. Sample questions included: “To what extent have you sought information on specific career areas or jobs you are interested in?”, “To what extent have you sought information regarding retail-related careers or jobs?”, “To what extent have you tried retail-related work roles to see if you’d like them?”, and “To what extent do you feel that a retail-related career is the perfect fit for you?”.

*Demographics and previous retail experience.* Demographic questions included gender, level in school, year born, and expected graduation date. To measure previous retail experience, participants were asked if they currently worked in retail; if yes, they were asked to report hours per week worked and length of time with current employer.

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**Data analysis and results**

*Structural equation model*

Data were analyzed using EQS 6.1 (Bentler, 2004). We estimated the measurement model and then continued with the structural model (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). We estimated the measurement model using a multi-step process of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). As necessary, revisions to the measurement model are made prior to estimation of the structural model. Then, using the revised measurement model covariances, we estimated the structural model. To assess the internal consistency of the revised construct scales, we used coefficient alpha; scales for five of the six constructs met or exceeded minimum levels (0.70) of acceptable reliability (Nunnally, 1978; see Table I).
CFA revealed a significant chi-square statistic of 615.624 (df = 386, \( p \leq 0.001 \)). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.056 combined with the following incremental fit indices indicate moderate fit: non-normed fit index (NNFI) = 0.86, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.88, and standardized root mean-square residual (SRMR) = 0.066. CFA results were not as desirable as preferred; therefore, we investigated the standardized solution and standardized residuals. Final review of the CFA’s standardized estimates (\( \lambda \)'s) revealed significant \( (p < 0.05) \) loadings for each variable of 0.50 or higher (Bentler, 2004) and low standardized residuals. Given that the standardized estimates (\( \lambda \)'s) were satisfactory and the largest standardized residual was fairly low, no further modifications were necessary (see Table II).

The next step of modeling involved the estimation of structural parameters and hypothesis testing (see Figure 2). Factor covariances of the six model constructs produced by the measurement model served as the input data for the structural model (see Table III). Since a latent variable model has both a measurement component (that links the factors to their indicators) and a structural component (that represents the relationships among latent variables), the model represents a combined premise involving both components. Therefore, as noted by McDonald and Ho (2002), “it is impossible to determine which aspects of the composite hypothesis involving both components can be considered acceptable from the fit indices alone” (p. 72). Hence, McDonald and Ho (2002) propose a supplementary two-stage procedure that begins with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for the measurement model that yields a set of factor correlations and standard deviations or a covariance matrix, followed by the use of the correlation/covariance matrix (which has the same pattern of relationships among latent variables) as input for the structural model (see Table III). Using this procedure allows the fit values of the structural model to only reflect the structural model and not be contaminated by the measurement part of the model (Burnette and Williams, 2005).

The analysis produced a non-significant chi-square statistic \( (\chi^2 = 3.488, 2 \text{df}, p > 0.174) \) with a RMSEA of 0.062, indicating acceptable model fit. The following incremental fit indices also indicated good fit: non-normed fit index (NNFI) = 0.93 and comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.99 with a standardized mean-square residual (SRMR) of 0.025. In addition, strong and distinct item-factor loadings were produced for all model dimensions.

**Alternate structural model**

McDonald and Ho (2002) state that “for any set of multivariate data there will almost always be more than one plausible structural model. Both misfit and overfit of a single target model can be taken to imply model modification (adding or deleting

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<tr>
<td>Retail work includes opportunities for leadership</td>
<td>4.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail work has a well-defined career path</td>
<td>3.202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail work has many management opportunities</td>
<td>4.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail work is a prestigious career</td>
<td>2.917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail work provides the ability to function as a team</td>
<td>4.342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail work includes opportunity to contribute to society</td>
<td>3.466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail work includes work-related travel</td>
<td>3.523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail work includes long hours</td>
<td>4.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail work includes many nights/weekends</td>
<td>4.201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail work is exciting</td>
<td>3.518</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 1 = not important, 5 = very important; *item deleted during confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

Table II. Mean, standard deviation and standardized factor loading by item measure (continued)
Construct: item measures | Mean | Standard deviation | Original CFA: standardized estimates (λ’s) | Final CFA: standardized estimates (λ’s)
--- | --- | --- | --- | ---
Retail jobs are dead-end \* | 3.632 | 0.921 | 0.634 | 0.623
Chances are good for promotion in retailing | 3.674 | 0.831 | 0.489* | *
Working in retail is worthwhile | 3.663 | 0.845 | 0.793 | 0.794

Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree; *item deleted during CFA; \* reverse-coded item

Supervisory support (SS) | 5.119 | 0.681 |  | 
My supervisor went out of his/her way to make my life easier for me | 3.135 | 1.284 | 0.415* | *
It was easy to talk with my supervisor | 6.171 | 0.827 | 0.712 | 0.799
My supervisor could be relied on when things got tough for me at work | 5.135 | 1.347 | 0.572 | 0.519
My supervisor was willing to listen to my personal problems | 3.181 | 1.477 | 0.313* | *
My supervisor respected me | 6.746 | 0.552 | 0.494* | *
My supervisor appreciated the work I did | 6.347 | 0.816 | 0.603 | 0.536

Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; *item deleted during CFA

Future psychological contract: entitlement perceptions of employer obligations (PSY_ER) |  |  |  |  | 
Promotion and advancement | 3.886 | 1.050 | 0.591 | 0.615
Competitive pay (omit if internship was unpaid) | 3.192 | 1.145 | 0.494* | *
Pay based on current level of performance (omit if internship was unpaid) | 4.254 | 0.850 | 0.329* | *
Adequate structure for training | 4.503 | 0.811 | 0.363* | *
Anticipated number of working hours was approximately equal to the number of hours actually worked | 3.456 | 1.181 | 0.622 | 0.662
Career development | 3.959 | 0.889 | 0.589 | 0.568
Sufficient level of responsibility and power | 3.477 | 1.021 | 0.550 | 0.512
Support with personal problems | 2.404 | 1.159 | 0.399* | *
Adequate supervision and feedback about my job performance | 4.368 | 0.732 | 0.378* | *

Scale: 1 = not at all obligated, 5 = very obligated; *item deleted during CFA

Future psychological contract: entitlement perceptions of employee obligations (PSY_EE) |  |  |  |  | 
Working extra hours | 3.150 | 1.165 | 0.474* | *
Loyalty | 4.308 | 0.857 | 0.628 | 0.690
Volunteering to do non-required tasks on the job | 3.073 | 1.170 | 0.474* | *
Advance notice if taking a job elsewhere | 4.528 | 0.823 | 0.347* | *

Table II.
Construct: item measures | Mean | Standard deviation | Original CFA: standardized estimates (λ’s) | Final CFA: standardized estimates (λ’s)
---|---|---|---|---
Willingness to accept a transfer | 2.881 | 1.119 | 0.612 * | 0.559 *
Refusal to support the employer’s competitors | 2.834 | 1.205 | 0.442 * | *
Protection of proprietary information | 4.575 | 0.711 | 0.289 * | *
Spending a minimum of two years with the company | 2.699 | 1.239 | 0.475 * | *

Scale: 1 = not at all obligated, 5 = very obligated; *item deleted during CFA

Career exploration (CE)

| Item | Mean | Standard deviation | Original CFA: standardized estimates (λ’s) | Final CFA: standardized estimates (λ’s) |
---|---|---|---|---
To what extent have you sought information on specific career areas or jobs you are interested in? | 3.079 | 0.868 | 0.540 | 0.591 |
To what extent have you sought information regarding retail-related careers? | 3.301 | 1.209 | 0.540 | 0.591 |
To what extent have you reflected on how your past experiences can be integrated into your future career? | 3.000 | 1.365 | 0.813 | 0.948 |
To what extent have you tried new work roles to see if you’d like them? | 3.617 | 1.136 | 0.486 * | *
To what extent have you tried retail-related work roles to see if you’d like them? | 2.793 | 1.224 | 0.415 * | *
To what extent do you feel that a retail-related career is the perfect fit for you? | 2.948 | 1.298 | 0.658 | 0.554 |
To what extent have you sought information on specific career areas or jobs you are interested in? | 3.062 | 1.261 | 0.667 | 0.590 |

Scale: 1 = very small extent, 5 = very large extent; *item deleted during CFA

Table II.

Figure 2. SEM path model for Generation Y and career choice

Note: Bold coefficient values = p < 0.05; N = 193

Source: Adapted from Steers (1977)
Table III. Covariance matrix of measurement model constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-entry retail job expectations</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of retail careers</td>
<td>0.264*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-0.042</td>
<td>-0.016</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future supervisory support expectations</td>
<td>0.415*</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>-0.107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future psychological contract: entitlement</td>
<td>0.262*</td>
<td>0.155</td>
<td>0.430*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceptions of employer obligations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.252*</td>
<td>0.216*</td>
<td>0.164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future psychological contract: entitlement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.252*</td>
<td>0.216*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceptions of employee obligations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.296*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career exploration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *p < 0.05. Sample covariances are in the lower triangle in italic; variance-standardized residuals (discrepancies) are in the upper triangle.
Therefore, as an alternative model that fit within the scope of our theoretical frameworks, we tested a fully mediated model by constraining the following hypothesized paths to zero (0):

**H1.** The path from pre-entry retail job expectations to career exploration.

**H2.** The path from perceptions of retail careers to career exploration (see Figure 3).

Results of the alternate model yielded a significant chi-square statistic ($\chi^2 = 40.013$, 4 df, $p < 0.001$) with a RMSEA of 0.217, indicating poor fit. The following incremental fit indices also indicate poor model fit: $\text{NNFI} = 0.14$, $\text{CFI} = 0.87$, $\text{SRMR} = 0.093$. After comparing the two models on RMSEA, CFI and SRMR, as suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999), it is clear that our original hypothesized model (Figure 2) provides the best fit for the data.

Additionally, a chi-square difference test between the original hypothesized model (see Figure 2) and the alternate model (see Figure 3) revealed a significant chi-square difference of 36.525 (df = 2). Since the $\chi^2$ difference is larger than the critical value of 5.99 listed in the chi-square table ($\alpha = 0.05$), we can reject the null hypothesis that the two constrained paths in the alternate model (see Figure 3) are equal to zero (0); hence, these results combined with the aforementioned comparison of fit indices (i.e. RMSEA, CFI and SRMR) reveals that our original model (see Figure 2) is the preferred model.

**Hypothesis testing**

The first hypotheses posed that college seniors’ pre-entry retail job expectations would have a positive and significant influence on their perceptions of retail careers ($H1a$) and future supervisory support expectations ($H1b$). $H1a$ ($\beta = 0.264, t = 3.793, p < 0.05$) and $H1b$ ($\beta = 0.415, t = 6.320, p < 0.05$) were supported; hence, expectations regarding a retail career is a significant factor in the level of support respondents feel they should receive from a future supervisor and their perceptions of what a retail career should entail.

**Notes:** Bold coefficient values = $p < 0.05$; $^a$ ---- Path constrained to 0; $N = 193$

**Source:** Adapted from Steers (1977)
In H2, we posited that pre-entry retail job expectations (H2a), future supervisory support expectations (H2b) and perceptions of retail careers (H2c) would have a positive and significant influence on entitlement perceptions of employer obligations. However, only future supervisory support expectations (H2b) significantly influenced entitlement perceptions of employer obligations ($\beta = 0.394, t = 5.564, p < 0.05$). Because newcomers tend to rely on supervisors to carry out many of the contractual obligations owed to them, employees are likely to view supervisors as the chief agents for establishing and maintaining entitlement perceptions (i.e. future psychological contract).

For H3, we posited that pre-entry retail job expectations (H3a), future supervisory support expectations (H3b), and perceptions of retail careers (H3c) would have a positive and significant influence on entitlement perceptions of employee obligations. As hypothesized, pre-entry retail job expectations ($\gamma = 0.175, t = 2.253, p < 0.05$) and perceptions of retail careers ($\beta = 0.164, t = 2.305, p < 0.05$) had a positive and significant influence on entitlement perceptions of employee obligations. This suggests that expectations of a job in retailing, combined with existing perceptions of a career in retailing, significantly contribute to what college seniors feel they will owe their future employer (i.e. entitlement perceptions of employee obligations). However, future supervisory support expectations had a positive – albeit non-significant – influence on entitlement perceptions of employee obligations ($\beta = 0.080, t = 1.059, p > 0.05$); essentially, we found no relationship between supervisory support expectations and perceptions of what employees feel they owe the company.

H4 stated that pre-entry retail job expectations (H4a), perceptions of retail careers (H4b), entitlement perceptions of employer obligations (H4c), and entitlement perceptions of employee obligations (H4d) would have a positive and significant influence on career exploration. As hypothesized, pre-entry retail job expectations ($\gamma = 0.172, t = 2.548, p > 0.05$), perceptions of retail careers ($\beta = 0.039, t = 5.111, p < 0.05$), and entitlement perceptions of employer obligations ($\beta = 0.181, t = 2.354, p < 0.05$) had a significant influence on college seniors’ career exploration. Conversely, entitlement perceptions of employer obligations had a negative and non-significant ($\beta = -0.043, t = -0.560, p > 0.05$) influence on college seniors’ career exploration (see Figure 2). Because about half of the college seniors in this study were currently working in retail, it is possible that they used existing negative notions or experiences regarding employer obligations (e.g. low pay, lack of training, inadequate supervision and feedback) as the driver behind their career exploration process, such that the higher the obligation expectations, the less time and effort they would spend on the career exploration process. However, one noteworthy finding is that college seniors’ pre-entry retail job expectations and perceptions of retail careers had a significant direct and indirect (i.e. mediated by entitlement perceptions of employee obligations) influence on career exploration. These results contribute to the limited body of research regarding the holistic relationship that integrates college students’ pre-entry retail job expectations, perceptions or retail careers, and their entitlement perceptions of their future job obligations. See Table IV for a summary of the hypothesized relationships results.

Conclusions

Discussion and implications

Because college seniors’ pre-entry retail job expectations and perceptions of retail careers were significant predictors of their entitlement perceptions of employee
obligations, college students’ expectations of retail careers and their perceptions of retailing as a career can lend insight regarding what they feel they will owe their future employer. This information is important to both academia and practitioners because having a more concrete understanding of students’ expectations and perceptions regarding a career in retailing will assist advisors and professors in preparing students for their future careers, and it may soften the transition from higher education to the world of work. If retail practitioners partner with academia and assist in the delivery of accurate information regarding responsibilities of a career in retailing, then transition shock may be diminished. In addition, the fact that college seniors’ future supervisory support expectations had a significant impact on entitlement perceptions of employer obligations highlights the critical role that the supervisor plays in the transition from higher education to the world of work.

Furthermore, college seniors’ pre-entry retail job expectations, perceptions of retail careers, and entitlement perceptions of employee obligations were significant predictors of career exploration, suggesting college seniors’ preconceived notions (i.e. expectations and perceptions) of retail careers, combined with what they feel they would owe their future employer, are instrumental in determining retail career exploration decisions. Additionally, our findings are similar to Rousseau’s (2000) in that expectations and perceptions feed into psychological contracts, supporting our logic that college seniors’ entitlement perceptions can be conceptualized as a surrogate to current retail employees’ psychological contracts.

Managerial implications for the recruitment of Generation Y college seniors
Study results provide useful criteria for a number of organizational development strategies to assist with the school to work transition and may also improve the success rate of employee recruitment of Gen Y. Findings also offer input for the recruitment process, the socialization process, and employee development initiatives, each of which are critical (and significantly different from previous generations) factors in attracting, recruiting, and retaining Gen Y employees.

For the recruitment of college seniors, it is important to identify their expectations and their career exploration process regarding careers in retailing. To ease the
transition from higher education to the world of work, and to vitalize and sell the concept of “retailing as a career”, is important when assisting college students who have chosen retailing as a major or a career option. College seniors are often targeted for recruitment, and they need to be confident that they have chosen a career that will lead to success; academicians need to help solidify career choice and provide college students with the proper career management tools.

Noe (1996) stated that “career management is the process by which individuals collect information about values, interests, and skill strengths and weaknesses (i.e. career exploration), identify a career goal, and engage in career strategies that increase the probability that career goals will be achieved” (p. 119). Because career decision-making has internal meaning to each individual (Kelly and Pulver, 2003), it is important to study career decision-making from both an academic advising perspective and a human resources (HR) standpoint, because both perspectives provide insight on the recruitment and retention process. It is important for each firm to recruit the appropriate candidate, and, furthermore, it is essential for that candidate to feel that they “fit” within the organization. This will help enhance long-term employee-employer relationships, and, ultimately, increase employee retention. Furthermore, Tymon and Stumpf (2003) state that a person’s career is an ongoing cycle of educational and work experiences that are meaningful to the individual and are value-added to the firm in which the individual works.

Therefore, retailers need to understand the expectations of new hires and be able to select training and mentoring strategies that reduce gaps between job expectations and job realities. In addition, retailers must recognize that different generations come with different expectations and require different systems of mentoring and training. According to Jamrog (2002), recruitment strategies that employers need to use to attract, recruit, retain and motivate young people in the twenty-first century will need to rely less heavily on traditional pay and benefits (i.e. job security), and instead focus more heavily on creating a work environment that allows individuals to grow and develop. Broadbridge et al. (2007) suggests job security is not a motivator because Gen Y does not expect long-term employment, which may fit well in the retail sector due to high job mobility (i.e. high turnover). Consequently, some suggested strategies for Gen Y employers include:

- increasing employees’ marketable skills via continued training and development;
- providing challenging work assignments and task variety;
- offering continuous feedback regarding performance and instant gratification via perks and bonuses;
- fostering a flexible work environment that encourages a work/family balance; and
- recognizing that pay alone will not be enough to retain employees.

Limitations and future research directions

One limitation of the study is that the survey was conducted online; thus, we could not control the number of respondents, nor could we control the time frame in which participants responded. Second, with the survey being online and sent out by faculty at various colleges and universities across the US, it is difficult to calculate an accurate response rate. In addition, as with most survey research, a common method bias may
be present because all of the data were collected using self-report measures. This type of self-report bias is likely to be present in behavioral research studies where the data for both the predictor and the criterion variables are obtained from the same person in the same measurement context using the same item context and similar item characteristics (Podaskoff et al., 2003). Therefore, to control common method variance through procedural remedies, one must identify the commonalities between the predictor and the criterion variables and eliminate or minimize the bias through the design of the study. However, because the constructs in the current study asked for college seniors’ attitudes or beliefs regarding expectations and perceptions of retail careers, entitlement perceptions of employer and employee obligations, and career exploration, self-report data are appropriate for this study (Clugston, 2000). In spite of these limitations, findings suggest directions for university faculty, academic advisors, and industry practitioners on how to facilitate college seniors’ transitions from higher education to the world of work by suggesting recruitment strategies that can attract, recruit, retain and motivate the next generation (i.e. Gen Y).

Future research should combine a study of employee recruitment with a study focusing on employee retention using a sample of current retail employees. The robustness of this combined study would enhance our understanding of the factors that increase employee retention rates and provide insight to HR personnel on what organizational factors can be altered and refined. Recent work investigating the impact of generational differences in psychological contracts (Hess and Jepsen, 2009) indicates that while small differences in generations exist, longitudinal studies are necessary to provide practical relevance for employers. By following career entrants through their first several years of employment, more strategic managerial recommendations may emerge. In addition, future research should assess the impact previous retail experience has on pre-entry retail job expectations, perceptions of retail careers, and entitlement perceptions of employer and employee obligations. It is possible that students who have no previous retail work experience may have more accurate expectations regarding entitlement perceptions of employer and employee obligations because they do not have the experience of part-time retail work to taint their expectations and perceptions.

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