
A CLOSER LOOK AT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTERVIEWER-INTERVIEWEE SIMILARITY AND RATINGS IN A SELECTION INTERVIEW

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The present study investigated the relationship of four types of interviewer-interviewee similarity (personality, attitude, interest, and physical) and ratings assigned in employment interviews. Ninety-two subjects took part in 46 mock employment interviews with one subject serving as the interviewer and the other as the interviewee. On the basis of a short personality inventory and a questionnaire consisting of 16 single-item scales, the similarity of each pair was determined. Interview scores received by interviewees who were similar to the interviewer were compared with the scores of interviewees who were not similar to the interviewer. The results indicated that personality similarity was related to interview scores. Similarity on the six physical appearance scales, three attitude scales, and seven interest scales was not related to interview scores.

In recent years, the employment interview process has been under much scrutiny with research efforts having been made to identify sources of interviewer behavior. For example, interviewers tend to weight negative information more heavily than positive information (Springbett, 1958); use nonverbal cues such as eye contact (Young & Beier, 1977); and are subject to contrast effects (Carlson, 1970).

However, one potential source of bias on which the research is not clear is the effect of interviewer-interviewee similarity. One reason for this lack of clarity is that much of the research done this far has failed to define the type of similarity that was being measured. For example, Frank and Hackman (1975) concluded that interviewer-interviewee similarity is a real and potentially serious source of bias and invalidity in the selection interview. However, it is important to understand that there are many different types of similar-

ity that could be important in the interview situation. For example, Baskett (1973) and Golightly, Huffman, and Byrne (1972) investigated attitude similarity, Frank and Hackman (1975) and Shepard and Hallinan (1980) measured interest similarity, Frank and Hackman (1975), Shepard and Hallinan (1980) and Rand and Wexley (1975) studies background similarity and Rose and Andiappan (1978) studied gender similarity.

Furthermore, not only are there many types of similarity, but research on each type has failed to yield conclusive and consistent results. For example, similarity of biographical background characteristics has been shown by Rand and Wesley (1975) and Frank and Hackman (1975) to have a positive influence on interview ratings, but Shepard and Hallinan (1980) found no such relationship. Frank and Hackman (1975) found that similar interests had a positive effect on interview rating but again these results were not sup-

ported by Shepard and Hallinan (1980). Similarity involving variables such as personality and physical appearance have not even been investigated.

Attitude similarity has also been demonstrated to have a positive effect on interview scores (Basket, 1973; Golightly, Huffman, and Byrne, 1972). However, the authors of these studies have failed to differentiate between the many types of attitudes (e.g. political, religious).

These conflicting findings are surprising when previous research studies have demonstrated that similarity is a major determinant of interpersonal attraction. This similarity-attraction relationship has been shown to exist in a wide range of situations, involving many different types of similarity and types of people (Byrne, 1971).

Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the effects of interviewer-interviewee similarity on interview scores. More specifically, the purpose was to investigate the relationship interviewer-interviewee personality, attitudes, interest, gender, and physical similarity and ratings of mock employment interviews. It was expected that interviewers will assign higher interview ratings to applicants who are similar than to applicants who are dissimilar.

Method

Subjects

All subjects were undergraduates enrolled in general psychology and industrial psychology courses. A total of 92 subjects voluntarily participated and all received extra credit for their involvement.

Procedure

The subjects arrived at the experiment location in pairs. One subject was randomly selected to be the interviewer, the other subject the interviewee. The subjects were given a prepared set of instructions telling them their roles during the 20 minute employment interview and the nature of the hypothetical job (manager trainee).

The interviewer was also given a set of prepared questions to ask the applicant. These questions were ones that research has

shown to be the most commonly asked during the interview (Hopkins, 1980; Martin, 1979). Some examples of these questions include:

- What is your greatest strength?
- What is your greatest weakness?
- How would you describe yourself?
- Where do you want to be in five years?

It should be pointed out that these questions were not intended to be job related, but rather, characteristic of the questions asked in the typical unstructured interview.

To determine personality types, both the interviewer and the interviewee were administered the Personal Profile System (Geier, 1979), a 24-item personality inventory that provides scores on four dimensions:

Dominance (D) - Fast paced, assertive

Influence (I) - Outgoing, extroverted

Steadiness (S) - Patient, loyal, calm

Compliance (C) - Detailed, accurate

The scale receiving the highest score is considered to be an individual's main behavioral style. The psychometric properties of the Personal Profile System have previously been demonstrated by Aamodt (1985) and by Kaplan and Kaplan (1983). The Personal Profile System has also been previously used in similarity research involving roommates (Cummings & Jones, 1986).

In addition to the Personal Profile System, a questionnaire consisting of 16 single-item scales was used to compare similarity of subjects on physical appearance (eye color, hair color, height, weight, dress style, and gender), attitudes (religious affiliation, political affiliation, and importance of a high G.P.A.), and interests (sports, television viewing, reading, hobbies, sorority/fraternity involvement, preference in music, and academic major). The questions were open ended and similar in content and scored in the same fashion as those in interview studies by Frank and Hackman (1975) and Royal and Golden (1981). Single item scales were utilized as the constructs being measured appear unidimen-

sional. That is, it would not seem prudent to form a multiple item scaled called "physical similarity" as there was no relationship between single item scales such as eye color and height.

Results and Discussion

On the basis of the subjects' main personality styles, interview pairs were designated as having either similar or dissimilar styles. A *t*-test indicated that the mean interview rating for interviewees with personality styles similar to the interviewer ($M = 7.46$, $n = 13$) was significantly higher than for interviewees with personality styles dissimilar to that of the interviewer ($M = 5.97$, $n = 33$, $t(44) = 3.22$, $p < .001$). The standard deviations for the two groups were 1.45 and 1.40 respectively. Similarity on the other 16 variables was not significantly related to the interview ratings.

The results strongly suggest that interviewees who have personality styles similar to the interviewer may receive higher interview ratings than applicants who have dissimilar styles. These results are in part consistent with the original hypothesis. Although there was a positive relationship between personality similarity and interview scores, there was not significant relationship between the other variables of interest and interview scores. This lack of a relationship is consistent with the findings of Shepard and Hallinan (1980) and Rose and Andiappan (1978) and might be explained by the idea that information about most attitudes and interests do not typically come out during an interview. Thus, attitudes and interest similarity may play a significant role in interpersonal attraction but not in the typical employment interview.

It is certainly possible that in some employment interviews, information about attitudes and interests are revealed. In the Frank and Hackman (1975) study, such a situation may have occurred as they did not limit the questions that could be asked by the interviewer. It is also possible that in interviews for real jobs, applicants pick-up cues from the office of the interviewer and use these cues to project similar attitudes and

interests. A study by Kopitzke and Miller (1984) revealed that office characteristics do indeed reveal information about the interviewer.

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