

Interview Structure and Interviewer Prejudice as Factors in the Evaluation and Selection of Minority and Non-minority Applicants

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An experiment was designed to test the effects of interview structure and interviewer prejudice on evaluations of minority and non-minority interviewees. Three hundred, thirty three undergraduate students were given a survey designed to measure prejudice. Of the 333 students taking the survey, 64 students were assigned as interviewers in one of 4 conditions: unstructured interview/high-prejudice interviewer, unstructured interview/low-prejudice interviewer, structured interview/high-prejudice interviewer, and structured interview/low-prejudice interviewer. The participants were asked to conduct three interviews and rate each applicant, one white and two black male accomplices, on his performance in the interview. The participants were also asked which applicant they would hire. The results of a 2 x 2 ANOVA indicated that white and black applicants of equal credentials are rated equally in the unstructured interview. However, black applicants are rated higher than equally qualified white applicants in the structured interview. There were no effects for the level of interviewer prejudice.

In 1964, a civil rights act was passed that prohibited unfair employment practices. In the landmark case of *Griggs v. Duke Power* (1971), the courts further defined the 1964 Civil Rights Act by ruling that employment tests must be reasonably related to job performance. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures (1978) state that in order for a test to be a reasonable measure of job performance, it must be reliable, valid, and fair. As a result of these EEOC Guidelines, many employers abandoned objective employment tests and adopted subjective employment interviews as their primary selection tool. Employers felt that because the employ-

ment interview was subjective, it was not covered under the EEOC guidelines and therefore need not be reliable, valid, and fair. In contrast to what many employers felt, using the interview for selection becomes a problem "when one realizes that the interview is considered a test under the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1970) testing guidelines for selecting employees" (Arvey, 1979). Therefore, the employment interview, known for its lack of reliability, validity, and fairness, is under the same legal challenges as any other employment test.

Reports of low reliability in the employment interview began as far back as 1915 (Arvey, 1982). Since that time, many articles have been published that support Arvey's findings (Baker & Spier, 1990; Heneman *et al.*, 1986; Mayfield, 1964; Schmitt, 1976; Schwab & Heneman, 1969; Ulrich & Trumbo, 1965; Wagner, 1949). Researchers have suggested that the low reliability results from the unstructured nature of most employment interviews. Intrarater reliability is low because an interviewer rarely asks every applicant the same questions. In addition, interrater reliability is low because interviewers disagree on what questions should be asked and how answers should be interpreted (Baker & Spier, 1990; Hakel *et al.*, 1970; Latham *et al.*, 1980; Latham & Saari, 1984; Mayfield, 1964).

As a consequence of its low reliability, the employment interview is also known for its low validity (Arvey & Campion, 1982; Baker & Spier, 1990; Heneman *et al.*, 1986; Mayfield, 1964; Ulrich & Trumbo, 1965; Wagner, 1949). Reported interview validities range from Weisner and Cronshaw's (1988) .11 to Hunter and Hunter's (1982) .14. Some of the reasons for the interview's low validity are that hiring decisions are based on the interviewer's intuitions, first impressions, and personal feelings (Gatewood & Feild, 1987; Keenan, 1977; Orpen, 1984; Springbett, 1958; Wexley & Nemeroff, 1974). Researchers have also shown that non-verbal behaviors (i.e., eye contact, smiling) lacking in job-relatedness, significantly influence interviewer hiring decisions (Hollandsworth, 1979; Rasmussen, 1984; Schmitt, 1976).

For an employment interview to be ruled unfair as a selection tool, it must first result in adverse impact or discrimination against minorities and then be shown to lack validity. Since the unstructured employment interview does indeed lack validity, all that is needed to judge the interview unfair is evidence of minority applicants being judged less favorably than non-minority applicants. Research does indeed show that female and older applicants are judged less favorably in the unstructured interview (Arvey, 1979; Dipboye *et al.*, 1975; Ferris & Gilmore, 1977; Haefner,

1977; Olian *et al.*, 1988; Rosen & Jerdee, 1976; Simas & McCarrey, 1979; Wendt & Slonaker, 1991). Despite the clear evidence for gender and age discrimination in the unstructured interview, researchers have obtained mixed results when studying discrimination on the basis of race. Surprisingly, some researchers have found no differences in the evaluation of black and white applicants (Arvey, 1979; Haefner, 1977; Rand & Wexley, 1975; Wexley & Nemeroff, 1974) while others have found that black applicants are rated higher than white applicants (Arvey & Campion, 1982; Mullins, 1982). Also, researchers have found no evidence of a possible interaction of interviewer prejudice and interviewee race on evaluations of applicants (Rand & Wexley, 1975; Wexley & Nemeroff, 1974).

By only viewing the research on overt forms of racial discrimination in the interview, one would think that the employment interview is not a tool for discrimination on the basis on race even when the interviewer is racially prejudiced. However, the fair and sometimes favorable treatment of Blacks found in interview research may be the result of a demand characteristic to appear unprejudiced (McConahay, 1983). If this demand characteristic does actually exist, studies measuring less obvious behaviors (*ie.* eye contact, verbal interaction) during the interview should find that Blacks are treated less favorably than Whites.

In fact, research does show that Blacks are treated differently than Whites when less obvious behaviors are investigated (Fugita *et al.*, 1974). For example, Bielby (1987) states that white interviewers exhibit less eye contact, verbal interaction, and friendliness when interviewing a black applicant than when interviewing a white applicant. Although the Rand and Wexley (1975) study found no effects of race on hiring recommendations, highly prejudiced interviewers did rate Blacks lower on less obvious measures of discrimination (*i.e.* intelligence, desirability as a work partner). However, the most convincing support for this demand characteristic are the studies conducted using the "bogus pipeline" technique (Branscombe & Smith, 1990). These studies show that evaluations of Blacks were lower when subjects believed their "true" attitude toward Blacks would be revealed by the apparatus. According to Branscombe and Smith (1990), these studies suggest that research participants "consciously choose not to act on (their racial prejudice) in order to maintain a valued identity as unprejudiced". Therefore, one should not dismiss reports that racial discrimination in hiring still exists (Duke, 1991; Pyatt, 1991; Wessel, 1991).

Despite its lack of validity, reliability, and fairness, the employment interview is still the most widely used selection method today and is unlikely to be abandoned in the near future (Arvey, 1979). Therefore, it is necessary to create an interview that is reliable, valid, and fair. The answer to the unstructured interview's shortcomings appears to be the structured interview. Studies of the structured interview show reliability coefficients ranging from .72 to .88 (Campion et al., 1988; Latham et al., 1980; Orpen, 1985). Along with reports of high reliabilities, studies on structured interviews show that their validity is within a reasonable range for predicting job performance. Validity coefficients between .30 and .61 have been reported (Campion et al., 1988; Janz, 1982; Latham et al., 1980; Orpen, 1985). The validity of the structured interview is important because it provides a legal defense for using the interview for selection even though it may have adverse impact against minorities.

Although much research has been done to study sex, age, disability, and race discrimination in the unstructured interview, no research has been done to examine whether this discrimination exists in the structured interview. Thus, the purpose of the present study is to look at the fairness of the structured interview by studying the effects of interview structure and interviewer prejudice on evaluations and selection of minority (black) and non-minority (white) applicants.

METHOD

Subjects

Three hundred, thirty three undergraduate introductory psychology students completed a survey designed to measure their level of racial prejudice. Students were assigned to the low-prejudice condition if they scored less than 10 out of a possible 30 on the Multi Racial Attitude Inventory and scored in the lower half of the Modern Racism Scale. Students were assigned to the high-prejudice condition if they scored 20 or above out of a possible 30 on the Multi Racial Attitude Inventory and scored in the upper half of the Modern Racism Scale. Thirty three high-prejudice and 31 low-prejudice students voluntarily participated as an interviewers in the experiment. In the low-prejudice condition, participants' scores on the Multi Racial Attitude Inventory ranged from zero to eight with a mean score of 4.52. In the high-prejudice condition, participants' ranged from 20 to 26 with a mean score of 21.97.

Although participation was voluntary, students were given extra credit points toward their introductory psychology grade for participation in the prejudice survey and the interview experiment. All participants were treated in accordance with the "Ethical Principles of Psychologists" (American Psychological Association, 1981).

Design

The experiment will be a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial design. The independent variables are: two levels of interview structure (structured and unstructured), two levels of interviewer prejudice (high-prejudice and low-prejudice), and two levels of applicant race (black and white). The dependent variables are interviewer evaluation of applicants and interviewer hiring decisions.

Materials

Survey: A survey consisting of 280 questions was designed to measure racial prejudice. The survey contained the Modern Racism Scale (McConahay et al., 1981), three scales (Ease in Interracial Contacts, Subtle Derogatory Beliefs, and Private Rights scales) from Woodmanse and Cook's (1967) Multi Racial Attitude Inventory, and questions from the MMPI and 16PF used to mask the purpose of the survey.

Interview Packets: All participants received an interview packet at least one week prior to their participation in the experiment. In the structured interview condition, participants received the structured interview packet which included a job description, three resumes, a structured interview, and an evaluation form. The unstructured interview packet was identical to the structured interview packet with the exception that there was three pieces of blank paper in place of the structured interview.

The job description included in the packets was a description for a position of a sales manager for Jammin' Sports, Inc. The position of a sales manager was selected because management positions are highly sensitive to prejudice (Branscombe & Smith, 1990).

The resumes used in the interview packets had been previously matched for equivalence (Toth, 1991). Therefore, before participating in the experiment, the interviewers should have perceived all three applicants as having equal credentials.

A structured interview for a sales position was given only to those

students conducting structured interviews. The interview consisted of 10 questions, each with 3 benchmark answers. Four of the 10 questions asked the applicant how past experiences and education make the applicant qualified for the job of a sales manager. The remaining six questions asked the applicant what he would do in particular job-related situations.

Accomplices: Six black and 12 white males served as applicants in the study. Each accomplice role played as an interviewee. In the unstructured interview condition, each accomplice was given a resume with equal credentials to talk about during the interview. In the structured interview condition, each accomplice was not only given equal credentials, but was also given equivalent answers to use during the interview.

Procedure

Sixty four students were assigned to one of four conditions (unstructured interview/high-prejudiced interviewer, unstructured interview/low-prejudiced interviewer, structured interview/high-prejudiced interviewer, structured interview/low-prejudiced interviewer). At least one week prior to conducting the interview, each student was given an interview packet. This one week period allowed the participants ample time to familiarize themselves with the information in the packet.

In the unstructured interview condition, the students were given the instructions to create interview questions before entering the experiment. Upon entering the experiment, each student interviewed three accomplices, one black male and two white males, for maximum of 20 minutes each. After the participants in the unstructured condition had conducted all three interviews, they were asked to give each applicant a performance score of 1 to 50 and to choose one applicant to hire. The students were told that they need not hire the applicant with the highest performance score.

In the structured interview condition, the students were given the instructions to ask only the 10 questions in the structured interview. The participants in the structured interview conditions were also instructed that, after asking the applicant a question, they must listen to the applicant's answer and match it to the benchmark answers provided for each question. Each student in the structured interview condition also interviewed three accomplices, one black male and two white males, for maximum of 20 minutes each. After the participants in the structured condition completed all three interviews, they were asked to add up the

points for each answer and provide a total performance score for each applicant. The participants in the structured condition were also asked to choose one applicant to hire, even though their decision need not be based on the applicant's performance score.

RESULTS

Once all data had been obtained, difference scores were computed for each interviewer by subtracting the rating given to the black applicant from the average rating given to the two white applicants. Therefore, a positive difference score indicates that the white applicants received higher ratings; whereas, a negative difference score indicates that the black applicant received higher ratings. A 2 x 2 (interview structure, interviewer prejudice) ANOVA was then used to analyze the difference scores. A chi-square was used to analyze interviewer hiring decisions.

Interviewer Ratings

As depicted in Tables 1 and 2, an analysis of variance on difference scores and a post hoc LSD test show that black applicants are rated higher than white applicants in the structured interview condition, but not in the unstructured interview condition. Level of interviewer prejudice had no effect on ratings of black applicants. No significant interaction between interviewer prejudice and type of interview was found.

Hiring Decisions

As shown in Table 3, the percentage of black applicants hired in the structured interview condition did not differ significantly from the percentage hired in the unstructured interview condition [$\chi^2(1) = .52, p < .47$]. In addition, a chi-square revealed that there was no significant effect for interviewer prejudice on hiring decisions [$\chi^2(1) = .01, p < .91$].

DISCUSSION

The results obtained showed that black applicants were rated equal to white applicants in the unstructured interview and higher than white applicants in the structured interview. However, an equal percentage of

Table 1**2 x 2 Analysis of Variance of Difference Scores in Ratings of White and Black Applicant.**

Source	df	Sum of Squares	F value	p <
Interview	1	163.93	4.79	.033
Prejudice	1	24.52	0.72	.401
Interview x Prejudice	1	0.00	0.00	.995
Error	60	2053.40		
Total	63	2241.86		

Table 2**Mean Differences Between White and Black Applicant Scores.**

Level of Prejudice	Interview Type	
	Structured	Unstructured
Low-prejudice	-2.06 ^{ab} (1.42)	1.14 ^b (1.56)
High-prejudice	-3.29 ^a (1.34)	-0.11 ^{ab} (1.56)

Note: Numbers in parenthesis are standard errors.

Note: Numbers that share the same superscript are not statistically different from one another.

Table 3**Percentage of Black Applicants Hired.**

Level of Prejudice	Interview Structure		Total
	Structured	Unstructured	
Low-prejudice	35.29	21.43	29.03
High-prejudice	31.58	28.57	30.30
Total	33.33	25.00	

black applicants were hired in the unstructured interview as in the structured interview. Therefore, the results indicate that although evaluations of applicants were affected by the type of interview, hiring decisions were not. In contrast to expected results and previous research (Branscombe & Smith, 1990; Mullins, 1982; Rand & Wexley, 1975), level of interviewer prejudice did not have a significant effect on either ratings or hiring decisions, nor did it interact with interview type.

The most likely explanation for the obtained results seems to be that black applicants are rated higher than equally qualified white applicants because black applicants are perceived as having to actually be "better" in order to obtain the same qualifications as a white applicant. Since many people automatically assume someone who is black grew up in the "ghetto" and had many obstacles to overcome, people may overvalue an accomplishment if the person who achieved it was black. The reason these results likely occurred in the structured interview and not in the unstructured interview is that in the structured interview, black and white applicants were equal on the answers they gave during the interview in addition to being equal on qualifications. However, in the unstructured condi-

tion, interviewers had more opportunity to perceive the black and white applicants' qualifications as being different.

Research has shown that the nature of the structured interview "reduces the impact of irrelevant information" (Baker & Spier, 1990). As a result of this research, it has been assumed that the structured interview is also immune to the influences of an interviewer's "irrelevant personal biases, expectations, prejudices, and stereotypes" (Baker & Spier, 1990). The results of the current study show that the structured interview is not immune to the personal prejudices and stereotypes of an interviewer. Despite the rather disappointing results of the current study, employers should not abandon the structured interview in order to readopt the unstructured interview. The structured interview still remains an improvement in reliability, validity, and job-relatedness over the unstructured interview.

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