



MONTCLAIR STATE
UNIVERSITY

Montclair State University
**Montclair State University Digital
Commons**

Department of Psychology Faculty Scholarship
and Creative Works

Department of Psychology

9-1-2006

The Structured Interview: Reducing Biases Toward Job Applicants with Physical Disabilities

Ellyn Brecher
College of New Jersey

Jennifer Bragger
Montclair State University, braggerj@mail.montclair.edu

Eugene Kutcher
Montclair State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/psychology-facpubs>



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

MSU Digital Commons Citation

Brecher, Ellyn; Bragger, Jennifer; and Kutcher, Eugene, "The Structured Interview: Reducing Biases Toward Job Applicants with Physical Disabilities" (2006). *Department of Psychology Faculty Scholarship and Creative Works*. 536.

<https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/psychology-facpubs/536>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Psychology at Montclair State University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Department of Psychology Faculty Scholarship and Creative Works by an authorized administrator of Montclair State University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@montclair.edu.

The Structured Interview: Reducing Biases Toward Job Applicants with Physical Disabilities

Ellyn Brecher · Jennifer Bragger · Eugene Kutcher

Published online: 8 November 2006
© Springer Science + Business Media, Inc. 2006

Abstract Research shows that the traditional job interview is a poor indication of a candidate's potential. However, when employers structure the interview process, they are more effective at predicting success, forming consistent evaluations, and reducing discrimination. The current study tested whether the structured interview also serves to reduce biases involved in interviewing applicants who have a physical disability. In the non-structured interview, results showed that there was a leniency bias, where raters evaluated disabled candidates more positively than equally qualified non-disabled candidates. Structured interviews reduced this effect. These findings add to the support for the structured interview as a way of increasing fairness in employee selection.

Key words structured interview · employment selection · disabled · discrimination

The 2000 Census revealed that nearly one in five Americans have a disability (Waldrop & Stern, March 2003). Those of working age who reported a disability were less likely to be employed than were their same age counterparts who did not report a disability. In response to discrimination against the disabled, The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was created to ensure equal opportunity for persons with disabilities in employment, State and

E. Brecher
Psychology Department, The College of New Jersey,
2000 Pennington Road, Ewing, NJ 08618, USA
e-mail: brecher@tcnj.edu

J. Bragger (✉)
Department of Psychology, Montclair State University, Upper Montclair, NJ 07043, USA
e-mail: braggerj@mail.montclair.edu

E. Kutcher
Department of Psychology, Virginia Tech Williams Hall,
Blacksburg, VA 24060-0436, USA

local government services, public accommodations, commercial facilities, and transportation, and requiring the establishment of TDD/telephone relay services. The employment realm includes, but is not limited to, all activities related to the recruitment and hiring of potential employees (US Dept. of Justice, May 2002). Unfortunately, the large unemployment rate among disabled Americans leaves one to suspect that overt or unintentional discrimination toward the disabled still occurs. The 2000 Census reported that disabled people between the ages of 16 and 64 were less likely to be employed than non-disabled people in the same age group. While the employment rate for men without a disability was 79.9%, the employment rate for men with a disability was 60.1%; similarly, while the employment rate for women without a disability was 67.3%, the employment rate for disabled women was 51.4% (Waldrop & Stern, March 2003). While employers are required by law to make employment decisions based on job relevant qualifications (US Dept. of Labor, 1978), the research on impression formation has found that interviewers form initial impressions of applicants based partly on physical characteristics. Research has shown that initial impressions subsequently influence post-interview evaluations of the applicant (e.g., Parsons, Liden, & Bauer, 2001) and, ultimately, impact the partiality in decision-making. Furthermore, the employment interview provides an arena where negative stereotypes held by the interviewer regarding such physical characteristics as age, race, gender and disability can lead to biases in his/her evaluations of applicants. These negative biases often result in unfavorable employment decisions based on irrelevant characteristics rather than job-relevant qualifications. Due to the differences in employment rates between people with disabilities and without disabilities, it is important to identify and implement selection methods that base decisions on the qualifications of the job applicant irrelevant of any disability that does not interfere with task performance. It is very beneficial to any organization to use a selection method that ensures that applicants with disabilities receive full consideration. First, the organization is ensuring ADA compliance. This can help them to avoid potentially costly litigation and unwanted situations that could damage their reputation. Secondly, the organization is ensuring that the best applicant for the job is chosen.

Research on employment interviews involving job applicants with a disability has yielded inconsistent results. In some cases, findings have pointed to discrimination against those with a disability. Bricout and Bentley (2000) and Ravaud, Madiot, and Bille (1992) found that when reviewing applications, organizational representatives rated job candidates who reported a physical disability less favorably than they rated equally qualified applicants with no disabilities. In addition, research using videotaped interviews found that a job applicant in a wheelchair was rated more negatively than equally qualified counterparts without a physical disability (Miceli, Harvey, & Buckley, 2001), even on dimensions that had no relevance to the specific disability (Gething, 1992).

Meanwhile, other studies have found a leniency bias in favor of job applicants with disabilities. In a study by Drehmer and Bordieri (1985), supervisors and midlevel managers reviewing resumes rated an applicant described as having a physical handicap as more favorable than a comparable applicant without a disability. Studies using videotapes of mock employment interviews also found more positive ratings for applicants with a physical disability than for equally-qualified applicants without a physical disability (Cesare, Tannenbaum, & Dalessio, 1990; Christman & Branson, 1990; Christman & Slaten, 1991; Nordstrom, Huffaker, & Williams, 1998).

While research has been conducted on how disability status influences employment interview decisions, (see Posthuma, Morgeson, & Campion, 2002 for a review), research has not yet been conducted on aspects of the interview itself that might influence that decision-making process.

Structured Interviews

While there is debate on the degree of improvement (Judge, Higgins, & Cable, 2000), there is general agreement that the structured interview has greater validity and reliability than the unstructured interview in the employment selection process (M. A. Campion, J. E. Campion, & Hudson, 1994; Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1997; Campion, Pursell, & Brown, 1988; Janz, 1982; Pulakos & Schmitt, 1995; Weekley & Gier, 1987). Numerous meta-analyses conducted on interview validity have documented the overall superiority of structured interviews (Huffcut & Arthur, 1994; J. E. Hunter & R. F. Hunter, 1984; McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt, & Maurer, 1994; Wiesner & Cronshaw, 1988; Wright, Lichtenfels, & Pursell, 1989) with correlation coefficients for the structured interview as high as 0.67 (Conway, Jako, & Goodman, 1995).

The term “structure”, when referring to an interview, can be broadly defined as “any enhancement of the interview that is intended to increase the psychometric properties by increasing standardization or otherwise assisting the interviewer in determining what questions to ask or how to evaluate responses” (Campion *et al.*, 1997, p. 656). While the overall goal of structuring the interview is to improve the likelihood that the employment decisions will be consistently made based on job relevant criteria, there are many different methods used to structure an interview. In their review of research on the structured interview, Campion *et al.* (1997) outlined several different ways to structure an interview: basing all questions on a job analysis, asking the same questions in the same order to all applicants (Graves & Karren, 1996; McDaniel *et al.*, 1994; Mercer & Seres, 1987), the use of situational-based questions that ask the interviewee to explain how he/she would act in hypothetical situations (Latham, Saari, Pursell, & Campion, 1980; e.g., “*Could you please tell me what steps you would take if you were trying to help a parent understand his/her child’s grade, and the parent became belligerent and started screaming at you?*”) or behavioral-based questions that ask how he/she has acted in his/her past work experiences (Janz, 1982; e.g., “*Could you tell me about a time during student teaching where you had a student who you knew was intelligent, but not achieving up to their potential and discuss how you dealt with the situation?*”), and the use of a validated scoring system to measure the applicants’ responses on the interview items or dimensions (e.g., behavioral anchored ratings scales or BARS) (Campion *et al.*, 1988; Latham *et al.*, 1980). It is important to note that interviews can use any or all of the structuring methods in varying degrees of intensity; any improvement upon the traditional unstructured interview has been shown to add incrementally to the validity of the interview (Campion *et al.*, 1997).

The abundance of research supports the use of such a structured interview in selection. Most organizations do use, and will likely continue to use, interviews as a primary selection device. While there are other methods that are also based on job analyses (e.g., work samples) and boast higher validity coefficients (e.g., cognitive ability testing), the job

interview—in general—is intuitively more attractive for many reasons. It assigns some sense of control and authority to the interviewer, it provides the opportunity for both candidate and employer to assess the level of congruence and fit (Judge *et al.*, 2000), and it allows for the simultaneous assessment of multiple dimensions such as interpersonal facility and emergent personality factors (Huffcut, Conway, Roth, & Stone, 2001; Posthuma *et al.*, 2002). The structured interview was designed to retain many of these unique benefits, while incorporating more standardization into the process.

Disability and the Structured Interview

The increase in validity of the structured interview also translates into more fair and legally defensible hiring practice. Williamson, Campion, Malos, Roehling, and Campion (1997) demonstrated that structured interviews were more successful than unstructured interviews in employment discrimination litigations. While their study dealt primarily with racial discrimination, the logic remains that structured interviews enhance objectivity and reduce the intrusion of idiosyncratic biases and irrelevant information.

Other research has been able to show how structured interviews can effectively mitigate the effects of other stereotypes and biases. While Kutcher and Bragger (2004) found evidence of discrimination against overweight job applicants and Bragger, Kutcher, Morgan, and Firth (2002) found evidence of discrimination against pregnant job applicants, both studies showed that the use of the structured interview reduced the impact of these biases. These findings support the premise that the structured interview does increase the fairness of the job interview, and is thus likely to reduce bias against job applicants with disabilities.

While conducting a thorough job analysis is an important step in creating a structured interview, it also serves to reduce the likelihood that discrimination against job applicants with disabilities will occur. The purpose of the job analysis is to determine the essential tasks of a given job, as well as to list the necessary characteristics, knowledge, skills, and abilities of its incumbent. If employment decisions were made based on comparisons of the job applicants and the job analysis, then applicants with disabilities would be evaluated based solely on their job-relevant ability; it would be less likely that decision makers would allow irrelevant factors to engender discrimination.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits discrimination against a “qualified individual with a disability...who, with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the employment position” and further defines reasonable accommodations as “affordances or arrangements that would not cause an undue hardship to the organization” (US Dept. of Justice, 1990). The question remains, how is one to identify what a reasonable accommodation to the job would be without knowing the essential functions of the job? The job analysis should successfully identify those essential job functions and the structured interview should be able to determine whether the job candidate can successfully complete those essential job functions. Unfortunately, without information that specifically links candidate abilities with job qualifications, it becomes more likely that a disability itself may unjustly impact such decisions. For example, it may be more likely that a severity bias takes place, where an applicant's disability might be

considered more severely and imposing than it actually is. However, a job applicant with a disability who is able to work to support him/herself is likely to be very hardworking and loyal to the organization that gave him/her a chance. For the organization, this is potentially a very beneficial outcome.

The Present Study

The purpose of the current research was to investigate whether a selection bias against an interviewee with a disability exists, and, if so, whether using a structured interview aids in reducing such a bias. The following hypotheses were tested:

- 1) There will be an overall difference in participants' ratings between a job applicant with a disability and a job applicant without a disability. That is, when participants are asked about (a) overall hirability and (b) recommended starting salaries, they will assign significantly different ratings for applicants with a disability and applicants without a disability.
- 2) There will be an overall difference in participants' ratings of applicants between the structured and unstructured interview conditions.
- 3) One of the primary advantages of the structured interview is its enhanced inter-rater reliability. Therefore, there will be more consistency among raters in their hiring decisions when the interview is structured than when the interview is unstructured.
- 4) The structured interview should aid in reducing the effects of subjective biases involving job applicants with a disability. Therefore it is predicted that there will be a significant difference in participants' ratings between job applicants with a disability and job applicants without a disability in the unstructured interview condition, but that there will not be a significant difference between job applicants with a disability and job applicants without a disability in the structured interview condition.

Method

Participants

Students ($N=194$) enrolled in an undergraduate introductory psychology course at a mid-sized Northeastern college participated in the experiment for course credit. There were 53 male and 141 female participants.

Materials

Job profile The experiment involved the hiring of a high school teacher. The position of a high school teacher was chosen due to the high likelihood that a physical disability (as was depicted in the videotaped interview) should not prevent an otherwise qualified job applicant from completing the essential functions of the job. Accommodations regarding access to the physical facilities might be needed but they are just as likely to be made for

students who might have a disability. In addition, the college students in the sample all have experience with high school teachers, rendering them more knowledgeable for the experimental task.

A job analysis was conducted through a multimedia information search. Resources included Internet career databases, printed career catalogues, the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* (US Dept. of Labor, 1991), and informal interviews with a currently-employed school teacher. The analysis yielded main activities and tasks, recommended personal characteristics, working conditions, salary rates, and requisite level of education and experience. This information was summarized in a two-page job description document to familiarize the participants with the target position. These data were also used as input into remaining experimental stimuli.

Interview scripts Researchers created two interview scripts to represent the general scenario of an interview between one male interviewer and one male job candidate. One script represented a structured interview and the other represented an unstructured interview.

The structured interview was created first. For each of the key dimensions of a high school teacher's success (e.g., presentation skills, dedication) as identified in the job analysis, behavior-based and situation-based questions were formulated to assess applicant proficiency. After each question was written, we used the job analysis to develop a behaviorally anchored rating scale (BARS); that is, for each question, answers were written to illustrate typical responses along a 5-point Likert scale. The script was written so that the typical response of the job applicant fell slightly above the midpoint anchors of the Likert scale, with the goal of representing slightly above average responses.

Then, the unstructured interview script was written based on the structured script. While the information provided through the questions and applicant responses was generally the same in the structured and unstructured interview, the structured interview script presented the information in response to behavioral-based and situation-based questions. In the unstructured script, the same information resulted from a more conversational interaction.

Scenario Four mock employment interviews were filmed onto a standard VHS cassette to represent the experimental conditions (structured with a disability, structured without a disability, unstructured with a disability, unstructured without a disability). The same two actors appeared in each interview (interviewer and job applicant). Each scenario began with the male applicant entering the office and being greeted by a male interviewer. The camera followed the applicant as he moved from the door to the interviewer's desk to show whether he was in a wheelchair or not. To control for additional stimulus variables, all videos used the same actors, properties, backdrop, and video equipment.

Demographic questionnaire A demographic survey was distributed separately (after the main questionnaire) to ask for the participants' college major, year in school, gender and suspected purpose of the experiment.

Manipulation check Two items were written to assess the effectiveness of the physical disability manipulation. One item asked participants if they noticed any limitations of the

applicant. A second item asked participants to list what limitations they noticed if they answered the previous question affirmatively. The term “limitation” was used instead of “disability” in attempt to solicit information without entirely giving away the answer that we were hoping to obtain. Data from participants in the two conditions that viewed an interview of a disabled applicant that did not make any mention of a limitation or a disability were removed.

Dependent variables A survey was designed to test the experimental hypotheses. The survey asked the following: “On a 5-point scale, how qualified is the individual to be hired?” In the structured interview conditions, participants arrived at their responses by calculating the total of the individual BARS item rating scores. The survey also asked the question “If the candidate were to be hired, in which starting salary group would you recommend he be placed?” Participants were instructed to circle the number associated with one of five salary ranges.

Procedure

Undergraduate students serving as research participants were seated in a classroom equipped with a standard-play VCR. The experimenter explained that they would be engaging in a typical task of a Human Resources decision-maker. Participants were given the high school teacher job profile to learn of the requirements and duties of the job. Participants then watched a videotaped interview and made a decision whether the applicant in the scenario would be suitable for the position. In the structured conditions, participants were (a) given the BARS packet as a mandatory decision-making aid, (b) presented by the experimenter with a brief explanation and general instructions in using the structured interview rating packet, and (c) told to take notes about the key elements of the applicant responses. None of these elements were included in the unstructured condition. At the conclusion of the videotape, all participants completed the hiring decision and salary recommendation survey, followed by the demographic questionnaire and the manipulation check items. Once collected, the experimenter debriefed the participants.

Design

A 2 (interview: structured, unstructured) \times 2 (applicant status: disabled, not disabled) factorial design was employed. As the two dependent variables (i.e., hiring decision and salary recommendation) are conceptually related, a MANOVA was conducted to test the effects of the independent variables and their interactions on the dependent variables. The Wilkes' Lambda statistic was reported for all MANOVA statistics. Analyses of variance were used to assess the effects of the two independent variables and interaction, against each dependent variable separately. *T*-tests were used to test the last hypothesis predicting significant differences between the disability conditions in the unstructured interview condition and no significant differences between the disability conditions in the structured interview conditions. Effect sizes (denoted by *r* or η) were reported for all focused tests to further determine the practical significance of the effects (Cohen, 1965). Finally, Levene's

test for homogeneity of variance was employed to assess the variance for Hypothesis 3. While not specifically part of the hypotheses, a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ MANOVA was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences in hiring decisions based on the gender of the participant “hirer”.

Results

Manipulation Check

Answers to the question regarding a limitation of the job applicant served as the manipulation check. Data from 15 participants were removed due to their responses not including any mention of a disability. This left a total of 194 usable participant responses.

Hypothesis 1

The results of the multivariate analysis of variance provided support for the first hypothesis; there was a main effect for the dependent variables of hiring decision and recommended starting salary, $F(1,190)=4.20$, $p=0.016$. Analyses of variance indicated that the disability manipulation significantly affected participants' hiring decision, $F(1,190)=8.22$, $p=0.005$, $\eta=0.20$, but did not significantly affect salary recommendations. Participants rated the job applicant with a disability higher ($M=3.88$) than the job applicant without a disability ($M=3.61$) on a 5-point “hirability” scale. Salary recommendations between the disabled condition ($M=3.08$) and not disabled condition ($M=2.91$) were very similar.

Hypothesis 2

The multivariate analysis of variance assessing differences between participants' ratings of structured and unstructured interview conditions was found to be statistically significant, $F(1,190)=7.23$, $p=0.001$. Univariate analyses of variance found that the difference was significant for the hiring decision, $F(1,190)=14.02$, $p<0.0001$, $\eta=0.26$, with participants rating the applicant in the structured interview condition less favorably ($M=3.55$) than they rated the applicant in the unstructured interview condition ($M=3.90$). This shows an overall leniency bias when the interview was not structured. The difference in salary recommendation between structured ($M=2.96$) and unstructured interview condition ($M=3.02$) was not found to be significant.

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis predicted that the variability of participants' hiring ratings would be greater in the unstructured interview conditions than in the structured condition. While the standard deviation for the unstructured interview condition ($SD=0.85$) was larger than the standard deviation for the structured interview condition ($SD=0.56$) the Levene's test for equality of variance was not significant.

Hypothesis 4

In order to test the hypothesis that structuring the job interview would reduce bias for or against job applicants with a disability, a *t*-test comparing research participants' ratings of the applicant with a disability and without a disability in the unstructured interview condition and a *t*-test comparing their ratings of the job applicant with and without a disability in the structured interview condition were conducted. Within the unstructured interview conditions, there was a significant difference between the ratings of the job applicant with and without the disability, $t(101)=2.62$, $p<0.01$, $r=0.25$. However, within the structured conditions, the difference between the job applicant with and without the disability was not significant.

In the structured interview, the mean rating score of the applicant with the disability ($M=3.64$) was only slightly higher than that of the applicant without the disability ($M=3.45$). Alternatively, in the unstructured interview, the mean rating score for the applicant with the disability ($M=4.14$) was quite a bit higher than that of the applicant without the disability ($M=3.73$). These data support the hypothesis that structuring the job interview may ameliorate bias for or against job applicants with a disability.

Discussion

Findings and Implications

The data provide partial support for the first hypothesis that predicted that applicants with a disability would be evaluated differently than equally qualified job applicants without a disability. Participants who rated the job applicant with a disability gave more favorable ratings than participants who rated the job applicant without a disability. These findings are consistent with some previous research that also found a leniency bias towards job applicants with a physical disability (Cesare *et al.*, 1990; Christman & Branson, 1990; Christman & Slaten, 1991; Nordstrom *et al.*, 1998). In fact, after considering that the scripted responses were designed to elicit an average rating of a 3 according to the BARS anchors, it became clear that there was an overall leniency bias for all candidates; this bias was even more prominent for the applicants with a disability.

While there was a difference in the recommended starting salaries of the applicant with a disability and without a disability, the difference was not significant. However, this finding is consistent with those of Kutcher and Bragger (2004) and Bragger *et al.* (2002) who used a similar methodology to investigate weight bias and pregnancy bias, respectively, in the structured and unstructured job interview. These results are likely a function of the narrow range of starting salaries listed in the job description and the inexperience and inability of undergraduate students to make realistic judgments about salary recommendations. Although a majority of the sample has had some work experience, few have been teachers or would have an accurate sense of teachers' salaries. Perhaps research with a graduate student population or, ideally, actual teachers would be necessary to truly investigate the effect of bias on salary recommendations. This does remain a worthwhile question to

explore, as biases may manifest in various personnel decisions, not solely in the hiring recommendation.

Support was found for the second hypothesis that predicted a difference in hirability ratings for the structured and unstructured interview conditions. Participant mean ratings in the structured interview conditions were significantly less than ratings in the unstructured interview conditions. These results suggest that when the interviewer is free to exercise more discretion in his/her decision, he/she will be more likely to engage in the aforementioned leniency bias.

Surprisingly, support was not found for the third hypothesis. While the standard deviation of structured interview ratings was greater than the standard deviation of unstructured interview ratings, the Levene's test for homogeneity of variance was not significant.

Hypothesis 4 was perhaps the most important prediction of the study. Results supported that interview structure did indeed reduce the leniency bias toward candidates with disabilities. These findings, when considered with those of other studies (e.g., Bragger *et al.*, 2002; Kutcher & Bragger, 2004), indicate that efforts to structure an organization's interview can effectively improve not only the accuracy, but also its fairness and defense against common biases and stereotypes.

As previously mentioned, the answers provided by the job applicant were created to present a slightly above average candidate. Utilizing the 5-point Likert scale, the answers were designed to result in an actual rating slightly above a score of 3. The largest differences in ratings were found between the applicant with a disability ($M=4.14$) and the applicant without a disability ($M=3.73$) in the unstructured interview and this difference was much smaller in the structured interviews (with disability $M=3.64$ and without disability $M=3.45$). Therefore, not only was the job applicant with a disability rated higher than the job applicant without a disability in both types of interviews, all job applicants were rated higher than actual (with the job applicant without a disability in the structured interview coming closest to actual). While the results of this study presented a leniency bias towards the job applicant with a disability opposed to a discrimination bias, neither type of bias would be a good outcome of an actual job interview. The ultimate goal is to conduct a reliable and valid job interview that will select a job applicant who is most qualified to successfully accomplish the essential functions of the job. The results of this study provide evidence that the structured interview was a more accurate interview.

It is very important to hire qualified applicants even if they have a disability, but it would not be a successful outcome to place them in positions that they are unable to fulfill. Therefore, a leniency bias is just as dangerous as a discrimination bias. For example, one scenario may be where a job applicant with a disability is rated higher than “actual” due to a leniency bias related to his disability. Then, if he were hired for the position, and were subsequently unable to complete the job responsibilities, it may be likely that his failure would be blamed on the disability. This, unfortunately, would perpetuate inaccurate stereotypes of people with disabilities. In this scenario, the applicant's lack of success was due to a lack of qualifications for the position, irrelevant of his disability status. In the current study, the fact that the structured interview brought the ratings of the applicant closer to “actual” suggests some evidence of the validity and reliability of the structured interview.

Theoretical Implications

The present study provides further support to previous research that has found a leniency bias towards job applicants with a disability (Cesare *et al.*, 1990; Christman & Branson, 1990; Christman & Slaten, 1991; Drehmer & Bordieri, 1985; Nordstrom *et al.*, 1998). However, more importantly, it provides support for a solution to this problem—one that yields a more accurate and fair employment selection decision. Because, as previously mentioned, while the law (e.g., ADA) requires that we consider qualified job applicants with a disability as equal to those without a disability, it would also be harmful to place a job applicant with a disability in a position with tasks that he/she would be unable to complete.

The present findings also provide further support for the importance of a thorough job analysis. In terms of staffing people with disabilities, a job analysis will better equip organizations to make reasonable accommodations by uncovering the essential functions and context of a given position. As suggested by this study, it can also aid in ensuring a fairer interview process.

Practical Implications

As important as it is to expand the literature on bias in the job interview and the benefits of structuring the job interview, the ultimate purpose of conducting research is to improve the state of the practice. The problem–solution nature of our research makes some of the practical suggestions resulting from the research very transparent. Organizations should have clearly written and updated job analyses so the “essential duties” of the job are easily understandable and legally defensible. The job analysis should make clear what qualifications are truly business necessities and which qualifications are desirable, but not necessary.

Organizations should also consider structuring their job interviews by basing questions on the job analysis, having multiple interviewers, having interviewers take notes, asking behavioral and situational questions, and having behaviorally anchored rating scales for interview answers. Champion *et al.* (1988) listed these and several other methods for structuring interviews, noting that adding each method to an interviewing process can incrementally add to the overall predictive powers of the selection device. The same may be true in reducing bias; Kutcher and Bragger (2004) found some decrease in bias with initial steps of structuring, and a greater reduction in bias when more steps were taken to structure the job interview.

It should also be noted, however, that despite the overall guidance toward structured interviewing, the practice does have some drawbacks. Even assuming that a thorough job analysis exists, considerable time and financial resources are associated with gathering different groups of subject matter experts to write interview questions, develop evaluation techniques and scales, validate questions and scales, and train interviewers (Harris & Eder, 1999; Van der Zee, A. B. Bakker, & P. Bakker, 2002). In addition, the standardization and restriction of irrelevant discussion topics has the potential to be interpreted by the interviewee as relatively inflexible and unfriendly (Boswell, Roehling, LePine, & Moynihan, 2003; Kohn & Dipboye, 1998). This is especially disconcerting when one

considers that the interview, besides being a predictor, is also a recruiting tool, where employers have an opportunity to make a positive impression on desirable candidates (Kohn & Dipboye, 1998; Posthuma *et al.*, 2002). Finally, employers may dislike using structured interviews because, by definition, they have less control and authority over the decision-making (Harris & Eder, 1999; Lievens & DePaepe, 2004). It seems that the benefits of the structured interview would outweigh these barriers. More research should investigate how the structured interview can be used as a better predictor and a tool to reduce bias, simultaneously addressing these practical concerns.

Our study found a leniency bias toward the disabled job applicants. This might be because the interviewers felt sorry for the candidate or it could be they are aware of American Disabilities Act, but unaware that it is NOT illegal to decide not to hire a disabled candidate who is unable to handle the essential duties of the position. These findings may indicate a need for those conducting job interviews to have training about what the American Disabilities Act actually means for the practice of personnel psychology and on the definition of “business necessity”, “essential duties”, and “reasonable accommodation”.

Limitations and Future Directions

While the study presents interesting findings that support and extend previous research, it is not without limitations. The procedure relied on student ratings of target applicants' hirability. While it can be argued that students generally have little basis from which to make such decisions, it should also be noted that similar simulations found no meaningful differences between students' and managers' predictions of subsequent job success (Singer & Bruhns, 1991). In addition, college students have plenty of exposure to and experience with teachers. Therefore, they are in a better position to rate job applicants in that position opposed to other positions and compared to other potential raters who have not had recent exposure to teachers. Furthermore, other studies where the participants had experience reviewing applications or making hiring decisions also found a leniency bias towards a job applicant with a disability (e.g., Drehmer & Bordieri, 1985; Christman & Branson, 1990; Christman & Slaten, 1991; Nordstrom *et al.*, 1998). Future research may wish to use samples of more experienced decision makers and to explore actual organizational hiring patterns and practices for applicants with disabilities.

Additional analyses found that gender, which was collected on the demographic questionnaire, did not affect the dependent variables. Perhaps there are other individual differences that make some raters more or less likely to engage in leniency biases or discriminatory behavior. Furthermore, other individual difference variables may make some people more likely to prefer or adhere to structured interview directions. Future research may aim to consider how these variables interact in interview decision-making.

It is possible that participants felt pressure to provide socially desirable responses, in the form of higher than necessary evaluations of a job candidate with a disability. As evidenced by the manipulation check results, it was quite clear that the participants noticed that the candidate in the videotape indeed possessed a disability. While it was experimentally necessary for participants to perceive the disability, it may have affected the results. It is socially undesirable to display such a bias, and participant responses may have been influenced accordingly. Nevertheless, as social desirability has the potential to affect the

results, future research might try to control for this limitation by utilizing a social desirability scale.

Our research found a leniency bias against a job candidate with a physical disability. Other research has also found such a bias (Cesare *et al.*, 1990; Christman & Branson, 1990; Christman & Slaten, 1991; Drehmer & Bordieri, 1985; Nordstrom *et al.*, 1998). While definitely possible, there is no clear evidence that this leniency bias occurs because interviewers feel sorry for such candidates. To the contrary, Cesare *et al.* (1990) found that participants who reported higher levels of empathy actually rated disabled candidates lower and participants who reported lower levels of empathy actually rated disabled candidates higher. However, it would be worthwhile to further research whether there is a pity effect or an overcompensation effect going on and to identify under what situations, and with what types of disabilities either effect occurs. For instance, are interviewers more likely to pity a job candidate with a physical disability and not a mental disability? Future research should investigate the type of bias and under what conditions they are most likely to occur.

The current research only looked at job interviews involving candidates with visible physical disabilities. The findings of this research cannot necessarily be generalized to situations where the candidate has less visible, but still detectable physical or mental disabilities. Drehmer and Bordieri (1985) compared hirability ratings of job candidates with either a physical disability (paraplegic), a mental illness (schizophrenia in remission) or no identifiable disability. Their results demonstrated that the applicant with a history of mental illness was less likely to be recommended for hiring than the applicant with a physical disability. Their findings were consistent with previous research that compared likely to hire ratings for physically and mentally disabled job applicants (Stone & Sawatzki, 1980). It is important to note that less visible disabilities such as mental illness are still protected under ADA. Future research should be conducted to determine if the structured interview is also effective at eliminating biases towards job applicants with non-physical and less visible disabilities. If the structured interview is in effect removing the influence of personal biases then it should be a successful mechanism for hiring employees based on job relevant characteristics. If the job applicant is capable of performing the primary job functions then the type of disability that they have should not interfere with the hiring decision.

The current research used undergraduate students as research participants (raters of the job applicant). Most of the students from this population have held jobs, but fewer have actually been responsible for making hiring decisions. However, by this time in their academic careers, undergraduate students have had a great deal of exposure to teachers. They should be able to recognize some of the knowledge skills, abilities and other characteristics of a qualified teacher. Nevertheless, future research should attempt to use subjects with more managerial or personnel experience. Future research should also investigate whether this bias exists in other jobs such as sales positions where employees will be in contact with customers on a regular basis.

Finally, there is a need to reconcile the inconsistent findings in the research dealing with selection of people with disabilities. It may be worthwhile to investigate mediating processes or explanations. For example, it is possible that an augmentation effect takes place, where interviewers may credit the candidate with a disability with more skills and abilities than an equally qualified candidate without a disability because of assumed hardships he/she has overcome (Kelly, 1972). Alternatively, perhaps aspects of the target

position would prime a leniency versus severity effect. Teaching is a position where physical disabilities may not readily seem to interfere with job success, but other positions may be more ambiguous about the presence or absence of physical demands on the job. The position of high school teacher was chosen for this study since an otherwise qualified job applicant with a physical disability is most likely able to complete the essential functions of the job. While a physical disability might present some mobility issues that could possibly require reasonable accommodations to the physical layout of the classroom or other facilities, it should not be an impairment to successful job performance. Therefore, other candidate variables (e.g., speed, efficiency, effort) and organizational variables (e.g., diversity orientation) may be tested as mediators. To test these variables, future efforts might vary the certainty in which a target candidate can adequately complete job functions, even with reasonable accommodation. To this end, studies can use different jobs and varying levels of specificity in job descriptions. Or, studies may measure participants' individual orientations toward diversity or the disabled population. Finally, research may explore how different disabilities impact these findings. While the physical disability (wheelchair) of the interviewee in the current study was chosen because of its ease of presentation and interpretation, it would also be worthwhile to present job applicants with different disabilities.

Conclusion

Organizations have the responsibility of exercising fairness in their human resources systems, including the screening and hiring of employees. The best selection practices are ones that focus on job-relevant knowledge, skills and abilities and reduce the degree of contamination due to job-irrelevant factors such as demographic characteristics and, in this case, physical disabilities. The structured selection interview has been introduced as a tool that improves upon the traditional interview regarding these critically important objectives. In the current study, judges witnessing a traditional job interview demonstrated a leniency bias in favor of applicants possessing a physical disability—a phenomenon not uncommon in previous research. Those witnessing a structured interview, however, did not exhibit such a bias. The findings suggest that more research should examine the mechanisms and processes surrounding fair treatment of employees with disabilities. In addition, the study adds to the support that structured interviews are practically and conceptually superior to unstructured interviews in reducing errors and biases while predicting individual job performance.

References

- Boswell, W. R., Roehling, M. V., LePine, M. A., & Moynihan, L. M. (2003). Individual job choice decisions and the impact of job attributes and recruitment practices: A longitudinal field study. *Human Resource Management, 42*(1), 23–37.
- Bragger, J. D., Kutcher, E. J., Morgan, J., & Firth, P. (2002). The effects of the structured interview on reducing biases against pregnant job applicants. *Sex Roles, 46*, 215–226.
- Bricout, J., & Bentley, K. (2000). Disability status and perceptions of employability by employers. *Social Work Research, 24*, 87–95.

- Campion, M. A., Campion, J. E., & Hudson, J. P. (1994). Structured interviewing: A note on incremental validity and alternative question types. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 79*, 998–1002.
- Campion, M. A., Palmer, D. K., & Campion, J. E. (1997). A review of structure in the selection interview. *Personnel Psychology, 79*, 655–702.
- Campion, M. A., Pursell, E. D., & Brown, B. K. (1988). Structured interviewing: Raising the psychometric properties of the employment interview. *Personnel Psychology, 41*, 25–42.
- Cesare, S., Tannenbaum, R., & Dalessio, A. (1990). Interviewers' decisions related to applicant handicap type and rater empathy. *Human Performance, 3*, 157–171.
- Christman, L., & Branson, D. (1990). Influence of physical disability and dress of female job applicants on interviewers. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal, 8*, 51–57.
- Christman, L., & Slaten, B. (1991). Attitudes toward people with disabilities and judgments of employment potential. *Perceptual and Motor Skills, 72*, 467–475.
- Cohen, J. (1965). Some statistical issues in psychological research. In B. B. Wolman (Ed.), *Handbook of clinical psychology* (pp. 95–121). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Conway, J. M., Jako, R. A., & Goodman, D. F. (1995). A meta-analysis of interrater and internal consistency reliability of selection interviews. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 80*, 565–579.
- Drehmer, D., & Bordieri, J. (1985). Hiring decisions for disabled workers: The hidden bias. *Rehabilitation Psychology, 30*, 157–164.
- Gething, L. (1992). Judgments by health professionals of personal characteristics of people with a visible physical disability. *Social Science & Medicine, 34*, 809–815.
- Graves, L. M., & Karren, R. J. (1996). The employee selection interview: A fresh look at an old problem. *Human Resource Management, 35*, 163–180.
- Harris, M. M., & Eder, R. W. (1999). The state of employment interview practice: Commentary and extension. In R. W. Eder & M. M. Harris (Eds.), *The employment interview handbook* (pp. 369–398). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Huffcut, A. I., & Arthur, W. (1994). Hunter and Hunter (1984) revisited: Interview validity for entry-level jobs. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 79*, 184–190.
- Huffcut, A. I., Conway, J. M., Roth, P. L., & Stone, N. J. (2001). Identification and meta-analytic assessment of psychological constructs measured in employment interviews. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86*, 897–913.
- Hunter, J. E., & Hunter, R. F. (1984). Validity and utility of alternative predictors of job performance. *Psychological Bulletin, 96*, 72–98.
- Janz, T. (1982). Initial comparisons of patterned behavior description interviews versus unstructured interviews. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 67*, 577–580.
- Judge, T., Higgins, C., & Cable, D. (2000). The employment interview: A review of recent research and recommendations for future research. *Human Resource Management Review, 10*, 383–406.
- Kelly, H. H. (1972). Causal schemata and the attribution process. In E. E. Jones, D. E. Kanouse, H. H. Kelley, R. E. Nisbett, S. Valins, & B. Weiner (Eds.), *Attribution: Perceiving the causes of behavior* (pp. 151–174). Morristown, New Jersey: General Learning Press.
- Kohn, L. S., & Dipboye, R. L. (1998). The effects of interview structure on recruiting outcomes. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 28*, 821–843.
- Kutcher, E. J., & Bragger, J. D. (2004). Selection interviews of overweight job applicants: Can structure reduce the bias? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 34*(10), 1993–2022.
- Latham, G. P., Saari, L. M., Pursell, E. D., & Campion, M. A. (1980). The situational interview. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 65*, 422–427.
- Lievens, F., & DePaepe, A. (2004). An empirical investigation of interviewer-related factors that discourage the use of high structure in interviews. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 25*, 29–46.
- McDaniel, M. A., Whetzel, D. L., Schmidt, F. L., & Maurer, S. D. (1994). The validity of employment interviews: A comprehensive review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 79*, 599–616.
- Mercer, M. W., & Seres, J. J. (1987, June). Using scorable interview “tests” in hiring. *Personnel, 57*–60.
- Miceli, N. S., Harvey, M., & Buckley, M. R. (2001). Potential discrimination in structured employment interviews. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal, 13*, 15–38.
- Nordstrom, C., Huffaker, B. J., & Williams, K. (1998). When physical disabilities are not liabilities: The role of applicant and interviewer characteristics on employment interview outcomes. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 28*, 283–306.

- Parsons, C., Liden, R., & Bauer, T. (2001). Person perception in employment interviews. In M. London (Ed.), *How people evaluate others in organization* (pp. 67–90). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Posthuma, R., Morgeson, F., & Campion, M. (2002). Beyond employment interview validity: A comprehensive narrative review of recent research and trends over time. *Personnel Psychology*, 55, 1–81.
- Pulakos, E. D., & Schmitt, N. (1995). Experience-based and situational interview questions: Studies of validity. *Personnel Psychology*, 48, 289–308.
- Ravaud, J., Madiot, B., & Ville, I. (1992). Discrimination towards disabled people seeking employment. *Social Science and Medicine*, 35, 951–958.
- Singer, M., & Bruhns, C. (1991). Relative effect of applicant work experience and academic qualification on selection interview decisions: A study of between-sample generalizability. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 76, 550–559.
- Stone, C., & Sawatzki, B. (1980). Hiring bias and the disabled interviewee: Effects of manipulating work history and disability information of the disabled job applicant. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 16, 96–104.
- US Department of Justice (1990). *Americans with Disabilities Act*. <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/pubs/ada.txt>.
- US Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section (2002, May). *A guide to disability rights laws*. <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/cguide.htm>.
- US Department of Labor, Employment, and Training Administration (1991). *Dictionary of occupational titles* (4th edition). Lanham, Maryland: Bernan Press.
- US Department of Labor, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1978). *Uniform guidelines on employee selection procedures*. http://www.dol.gov/dol/allcfr/Title_41/Part_60-3/toc.htm.
- Waldrop, J., & Stern, S. (2003, March). *Census 2000 brief*. US Census Bureau <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/disability.html>.
- Weekley, J. A., & Gier, J. A. (1987). Reliability and validity of the situational interview for a sales position. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 72, 484–487.
- Wiesner, W. H., & Cronshaw, S. F. (1988). A meta-analytic investigation of the impact of interview format and degree of structure on the validity of the employment interview. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 61, 275–290.
- Williamson, L. G., Campion, J. E., Malos, S. B., Roehling, M. V., & Campion, M. A. (1997). Employment interview on trial: Linking interview structure with litigation outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 82, 900–912.
- Wright, P. M., Lichtenfels, P. A., & Pursell, E. D. (1989). The structured interview: Additional studies and a meta-analysis. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 62, 191–199.
- Van der Zee, K. I., Bakker, A. B., & Bakker, P. (2002). Why are structured interviews so rarely used in personnel selection? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(1), 176–184.