

FEEDBACK REPORT FOR PARTICIPANTS

Asynchronous Video Interviews
Evaluating Applicant Performance

SMU REB # 20-039

Research Project conducted by:

Dr. Nicolas Roulin

Lindsay Clow

Department of Psychology

Saint Mary's University, 923 Robie Street, Halifax, NS B3H 3C3

Email: nicolas.roulin@smu.ca

In collaboration with

Dr. Joshua Bourdage, Eden-Raye Lukacik, Hayam Bakour, and Pedro Diaz

Department of Psychology

University of Calgary

Research Context and Goals:

Asynchronous video interviews (AVIs) have become popular tools for applicant selection. They differ from other digital interviews (e.g., Zoom or Skype interviews) because there is no communication occurring in real time. AVIs are growing in popularity because of their convenience of time and scheduling, their minimal costs and allows for many more applicants can be interviewed in a standardized fashion.

While the research is vast on the interview process, past work on other technologically-mediated interviews found contradictory evidence and concluded previous research cannot be generalized to AVIs. Although AVIs are standardized, existing research remains silent on whether this novel interview format could introduce new forms of bias. Because many applicants complete AVIs from their homes, their video background could provide evaluators with information about stigmatizing features that (a) are usually “invisible” in traditional selection contexts but become observable in AVIs, (b) are not always legally protected, and (c) can impact evaluators’ judgments. For example, if there is something apparent in the background that indicates applicant’s parental status, sexual orientation, or political preferences, the evaluator has the potential to discriminate against them because of it.

As such, this research examined how cues indicating parental status (Study 1), sexual orientation (Study 2), and political affiliation (Study 3) can impact judgments made about applicants, and especially perceptions of warmth and competence, and ratings of interview performance and potential work performance.

Research Method:

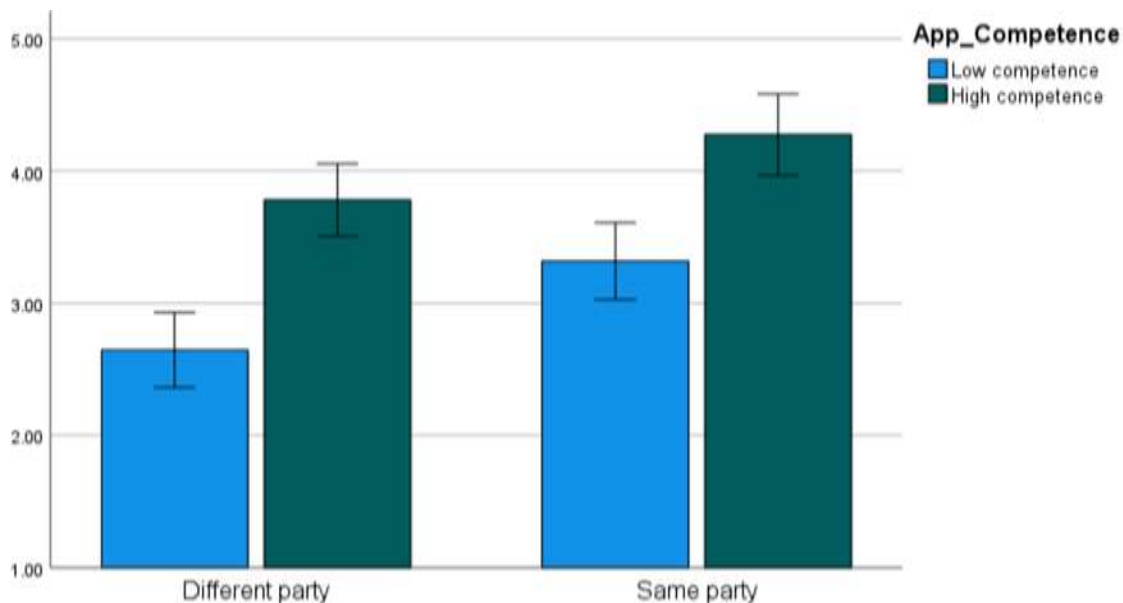
We conducted three experimental studies, where participants with hiring/HR experience were recruited from online platforms (Mechanical Turk or Prolific) and instructed to watch the recorded AVI responses of one applicant and evaluate them. The only thing that varied was the background information signaling the applicants parental status, sexual orientation, or political affiliation. For example, in the second study, the gay vs. straight applicants were the same individual providing the same interview responses. But the “gay” applicant’s background included a mug that read “gay and proud” (vs. “coffee o’clock” for the straight applicant), a small rainbow flag positioned on a bookshelf (vs. an American flag), and a framed picture on the wall including the applicant with a same-sex partner (vs. other-sex partner). See the screenshots below as an illustration:



Main Findings:

The effect of background information varied depending on the cues (or “stigmatized feature”) examined. Applicants depicted as parents were perceived to be higher on warmth and received higher interview performance ratings, but were not evaluated more negatively on competence or potential work performance. There was no effect of sexual orientation on any outcome variables. However, applicants who supported the same political party as the evaluator were viewed as warmer, and received higher ratings of interview performance and potential work performance.

The graph below provides an illustration of the findings for the political affiliation study. It shows that if the applicant belonged to the same political party as the evaluator (e.g., both Republicans or both Democrats), they would be evaluated more positively. It also shows that having the same political affiliation can help compensate for a lack of qualifications (i.e., providing lower-quality responses in the AVI).



Implications:

AVIs are often recorded from locations of the applicant's choosing, and therefore can have the potential to give cues about the individual. This research indicates that many (but not all) interviewers do notice cues in the backgrounds of AVIs, such as what is on one's beverage container or pictures on the wall. These background cues have the potential to impact not just perceptions of a candidate, but also evaluations of their interview performance.

As such, applicants should be very cognizant of the cues provided in their backgrounds. Altogether, we would advise applicants to be cognizant of their backgrounds, and to keep them clean and neutral.

From an organizational perspective, bias is possible in an AVI context and so organizations should be cognizant of this. For example, the efficacy of training programs to increase awareness of these issues, of utilizing only the audio, or enabling software with a background blurring feature could be investigated.