



# Effective Interview Techniques

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## Our Goal is to Interview with Equity

- 1) Understand how bias can (unintentionally) creep into interviews
  - Discrimination, stereotypes, prejudice, and implicit bias
- 2) Prevent bias from creeping into interviews
  - Mindset, debiasing, and “decoupling”

Subject Line: Prospective Doctoral Student Next Monday

Dear Professor [surname of professor inserted here],

I am writing you because I am a prospective doctoral student with considerable interest in your research. My plan is to apply to doctoral programs this coming Fall, and I am eager to learn as much as I can about research opportunities in the meantime.

I will be on campus next Monday, and although I know it is short notice, I was wondering if you might have 10 minutes when you would be willing to meet with me to briefly talk about your work and any possible opportunities for me to get involved in your research. Any time that would be convenient for you would be fine with me, as meeting with you is my first priority during this campus visit.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

White, Black, Hispanic, Indian, Chinese (male or female)

Sincerely,  
[Student’s full name inserted here]

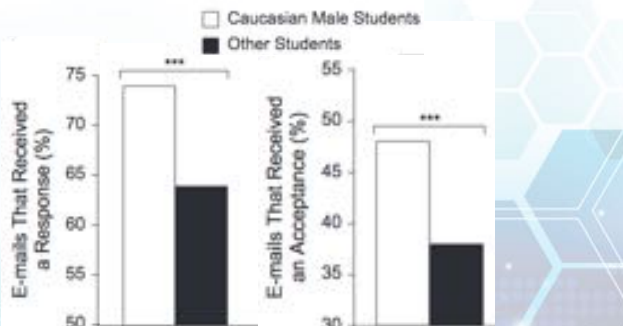
What Happens Before? A Field Experiment Exploring How Pay and Representation Differentially Shape Bias on the Pathway into Organizations

Katherine L. Milkman  
Modupe Akinola  
Dolly Chugh

Journal of Applied Psychology 2015

- Audit study in academia of over 6500 professors at top US Universities from 89 disciplines and 259 institutions
- Fictional prospective students wanting to discuss research opportunities before applying to doctoral programs
- Names were randomly assigned to signal gender and race (white, black, Latinx, Indian, Chinese) otherwise no change in message
- Faculty were significantly more responsive to white males request for future mentoring than to all other categories of students
- Particularly in higher paying disciplines and private institutions

## Professors Respond (Milkman et al., 2012; 2015)



## Psychological Sources of Bias

- **Discrimination – Behavior.** Differential actions that limit the social, political, or economic opportunities of members of particular groups.
  - 1) “Belief-based/statistical discrimination” – based on a stereotype
    - **Stereotypes – Beliefs.** Traits that are attributed to people based on group membership.
  - 2) “Taste-based discrimination” – based on prejudice
    - **Prejudice – Attitude.** Negative attitudes about certain groups and their members.

## Potential Pitfalls in Evaluation

- Research suggests that both prejudice and stereotyping can shift standards in evaluation without people realizing that they are doing so.
  - Majority men tend to be judged on their potential, whereas other groups tend to be judged on what they have already accomplished.
  - For majority group members, one strength is often generalized into a global positive rating, but for underrepresented group members, one weakness is often generalized into an overall negative rating.
  - Requirements are often applied rigorously to underrepresented groups, but leniently applied for majority men.
  - Letters of recommendation for female applicants are more likely to include “doubt raisers” or “hedgies” compared to letters for men. Women also receive less “standout” adjectives (e.g., brilliant)
  - Evaluators follow (biased) intuitions when evaluating candidates and then shift what they believe to be the most important criteria after the fact to match the criteria showcased by a majority group member.

## Implicit Bias

- Implicit bias: bias in favor of or against one group compared with another that occurs **automatically** (without requiring awareness, intent, cognitive resources)

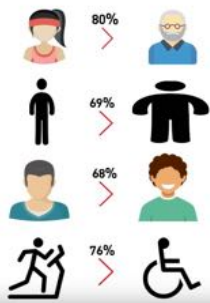
- Implicit **attitudes** and **stereotypes**
- Implicit Association Test (IAT)

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>

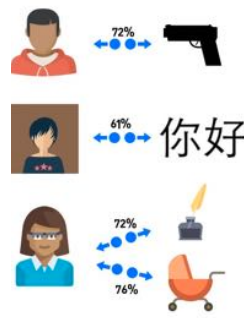


- What does your score mean?
- The score reflects the categories that “go together” in your mind. If *Black* and *Bad* are associated in your mind, then you will be quicker to respond when Black faces and bad words are paired together than when Black faces and good words are paired together.

### Implicit Attitudes



### Implicit Stereotypes



## Implicit Bias Predicts...

- Own behavior in socially sensitive situations
  - Meta-analyses:  $r$  between .15 and .25 (Greenwald et al., 2009 and Oswald et al., 2014)
    - Callback rates for job applicants of different groups (Agerstrom & Roth, 2011; Roth, 2007)
    - The extent to which people engage in awkward or exclusionary non-verbal behavior in conversations with members of different groups (McConnel & Leibold, 2001)
- Biased outcomes in the environment
  - Countries with stronger male-science IAT had greater gender achievement gaps in 8<sup>th</sup> grade science and math scores (Nosek et al., 2009)
  - U.S. cities with higher levels of racial bias on the IAT have greater racial disparities in shootings by police (Hehman et al., 2017)
  - U.S. counties with higher levels of racial bias had greater Black-White gaps in infant health outcomes (Orchard & Price, 2017)
- Other's behavior
  - Minority employees perform worse when they are randomly assigned to work with biased managers (Glover et al., 2017)

## Psychological Sources of Bias

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- **Ingroup Favoritism (vs. Outgroup Hostility)**

## Ingroup Favoritism (vs. Outgroup Hostility)

“Ultimately, many forms of discrimination and bias may develop not because outgroups are hated, but because positive emotions such as admiration, sympathy, and trust are reserved for the ingroup and withheld from outgroups” (Brewer, 1999, p. 438).

- Liking similar others still causes discrimination!
  - Study of hiring at elite professional service firms found that similarity (“fit”) in terms of lifestyle markers (leisure pursuits, experiences, self-presentation style) was cited as the top criterion for hiring at the interview stage (Rivera, 2012)



- **Bad News:** People have biases. They sometimes don't even realize they have them. Biases can affect behavior.
- **Good News:** The vast majority of people try to overcome their biases and their stereotypical preconceptions to treat everyone fairly.

We have the goal of preventing bias from affecting behavior. How?

- **Mindset** – thinking about our biases in productive ways
- **Debiasing** – eliminating the biases in our mind
- **\*Decoupling\*** - breaking the link between biases in our mind and behaviors we engage in

### Start with the right mindset

- **Be humble**
  - If you think you are objective, you are more likely to not be
- **Be mindful**
  - Biases more likely to creep in when we can't be deliberative
  - Slow down, pause, reflect
- **Adopt a learning orientation**
  - If you recognize that there is always more to learn and discover, then you'll stay on the look-out for more opportunities to interrupt bias
- **Remind yourself about your internal motivations to be fair and equitable**
  - You're here because you want to conduct an effective and equitable interview

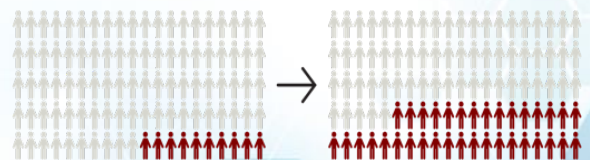
### Debiasing

- **Intentional, meaningful, long-term exposure to counter-stereotypical and counter-attitudinal exemplars**
  - Choose diverse and inclusive environments where you interact with lots of people who are different from you in lots of different roles
  - Curate diverse and inclusive representations in the media you consume
    - TV, movies, books, music...
  - Engage in a self-audit to determine how you may be letting implicit attitudes or stereotypes affect you

### Decoupling

- Breaking the link between bias and behavior
- "Take the bias out of the process rather than trying to take it out of the people."

When leading orchestras started using blind auditions...



...the percentage of women in orchestras rose from 10% to 35%

## Decoupling

- Breaking the link between bias and behavior
- “Take the bias out of the process rather than trying to take it out of the people.”

- ☑ Pre-determined job criteria
- ☑ Standardized evaluation forms
- ☑ Structured interviews
- ☑ Diverse search committees

## Preparing for the interview

- Remember: the candidate is interviewing you just as you are interviewing them
- Be inclusive - think about all of the signals you give. You want to create identity safety (not identity threat)
- Focus interviews on collecting information, not making the decision
- Create standard materials and ensure everyone receives the same treatment
  - Review your personal and group website
  - Create a welcome packet
  - Provide a list of everyone with whom they will interview in advance
  - Prepare structured interview questions asking everyone the same core questions that are directly related to performance on the job

## Decoupling Interviews for Medical Residents

### #1: Use pre-determined criteria (and be accountable to it)

- Make sure they are clear and concrete
- DON'T USE “FIT” AS AN ABSTRACT CONCEPT
  - Evaluating “fit” ends up being “Does this person’s experiences, interests, and style seem similar to me and to others I know in my field/department/hospital?”
    - Evaluating fit reproduces the people we already have
  - DEFINE what it means to “fit” in your residency program and evaluate those criteria instead
    - Curious/inquisitive
    - Hard-working

## Decoupling Interviews for Medical Residents

### #2: Use standardized evaluation forms

Please rate the candidate on each of the following:

	excellent	good	neutral	fair	poor	unable to judge
Potential for (Evidence of) scholarly impact						
Potential for (Evidence of) research productivity						
Potential for (Evidence of) research funding						
Potential for (Evidence of) collaboration						
Potential for (Evidence of) outreach efforts to diverse groups						
Fit with department's priorities						
Ability to make positive contribution to department's climate						
Potential (Demonstrated ability) to attract and supervise graduate students						
Potential (Demonstrated ability) to teach and supervise undergraduates						
Potential (Demonstrated ability) to be a conscientious university community member						

Candidate's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate which of the following are true for you (check all that apply):

Read candidate's CV       Met with candidate

Read candidate's scholarship       Attended lunch or dinner with candidate

Read candidate's letters of recommendation       Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Attended candidate's job talk

Please comment on the candidate's scholarship as reflected in the job talk: \_\_\_\_\_

## Decoupling Interviews for Medical Residents

### #2: Use standardized evaluation forms

- Make sure that the traits you evaluate are not stereotypically associated with some groups more than others (Gaucher et al., 2011)
  - e.g., Women are stereotyped as more cooperative/understanding/committed than men. Men are stereotyped as more competitive/confident/driven than women.
  - If your form only asks you to evaluate applicants for how confident and driven they are, that could favor men.
  - Instead, consider a balance of desirable traits or neutral traits

## Decoupling Interviews for Medical Residents

### #3: Use structured interviews

“The use of unstructured interviews despite structured interviews being more predictive of future job performance] has been one of the most persistent gaps between research and practice” (Wolgast et al, 2018).

## Decoupling Interviews for Medical Residents

### #3: Use structured interviews

- Structured interviews predict job performance better than unstructured interviews (Macan, 2009)
  - Interviewers open themselves up to various forms of bias when they ask questions that come to mind in the interview.
  - Instead, plan to ask the same set of questions for all applicants in the same order.
    - You can add follow-up questions / transitions to make it more natural

## Decoupling Interviews for Medical Residents

### #3: Use structured interviews

#### Some Example Qs:

- How are your past experiences relevant for the current position?
- What actions do you take when working in a team to ensure consistent communication?
- What skills would you need to develop for this job?
- How do you function under stress?

## Decoupling Interviews for Medical Residents

### #3: Use structured interviews

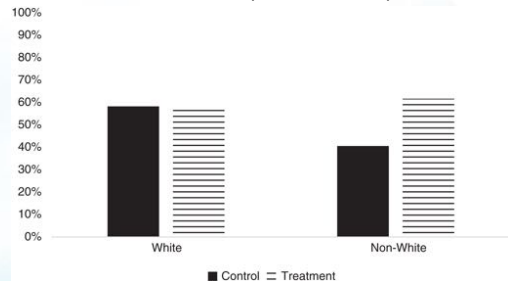
- Make sure that the questions you ask are geared towards people from all groups. Consider how they can reduce threat.
  - e.g., For many underrepresented groups, goals are not just personal, but tied to their community. Give applicants space to reflect on all of their goals.

“Unscripted interactions, particularly those occurring between a candidate from a minority group and an interviewer from a majority group, were shown to cause discomfort and anxiety, which can lead to discriminatory behavior on the part of the majority member and heightened awareness of the racial aspects of the interaction for the minority candidate” (O’Meara et al, 2020)

## The power of a question...

- Leveling the playing field (2017): A field study manipulated the language before a police force exam to help minorities feel less anxious and consider why being on the police force would be meaningful to them and their community:
  - First, we removed any language that was unnecessary and may have caused anxiety. Specifically, this meant removing a sentence that read: **‘Please note there is no appeals process for this stage.’**
  - Second, we changed the language to be more positive and to prime success and belonging. In practice, this meant beginning the email with **‘Congratulations! You successfully completed the Behaviour Style Questionnaire’** and ending it with **‘Good luck!’**
  - Finally, we added the following sentence: **‘Before you start the test, I’d like you to take some time to think about why you want to be a police constable. For example, what is it about being a police constable that means the most to you and your community?’**

Levelling the playing field in police recruitment: Evidence from a field experiment on test performance



Levelling the playing field in police recruitment: Evidence from a field experiment on test performance. Volume 55, Issue 4, Pages 943-956, First published: 02 August 2017, DOI: (10.1111/pspm.12346)

## Decoupling Interviews for Medical Residents

### #3: Use structured interviews

#### Some Example Qs:

- How are your past experiences relevant for the current position?
- What actions do you take when working in a team to ensure consistent communication?
- What skills would you need to develop for this job?
- How do you function under stress?
- **Why do you want to go into anesthesiology? What is it about being an anesthesiologist that means the most to you and your community?**

## Decoupling Interviews for Medical Residents

### #4: Use a diverse search committee

- Encourage those with different backgrounds and identities to serve on the search and interview committee.

### (ALT #4) Gather Diverse Perspectives

- If interviewing as part of a relatively homogenous committee, you can implement diverse perspectives by having current residents, students, colleagues, or staff members also look at application materials.

## Final tips to consider

- Hire in batches if possible
  - More likely to consider diversity when hiring several people at a time than when hiring one at a time (Chang et al., 2020)
  - Easier to assess performance comparatively (Bohnet et al., 2015)
- Create a finalist pool that includes multiple people from underrepresented backgrounds
  - Having more than one woman or minority in the finalist pool appears to increase the likelihood of hiring a woman or minority — beyond the increase you'd expect simply due to probability. (Johnson et al., 2016)
- Consider how to assure that your group decision making process is informed by all group members
  - You may want to have the more junior people share their views first.
  - You may want to explicitly state that you're looking for people to share different views from what has already been shared.
  - You may want to explicitly ask people to share any unique knowledge that they have.

We have the goal of preventing bias from affecting behavior. How?

### 1) Mindset

- Be humble, be mindful, adopt a learning orientation, remind yourself about your internal motivation to be equitable

### 2) Debiasing

- Choose diverse and inclusive environments to interact in, curate your media consumption to be diverse and inclusive, engage in a "self-audit"



### 3)\*Decoupling\*

- e.g., hiring: Use pre-determined search criteria, standardized evaluation forms, structured interviews, and a diverse search committee

Thank you!

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