EFFECTIVENESS OF PATTERNED BEHAVIOR DESCRIPTION, SITUATIONAL AND CONVENTIONAL STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION BIAS: PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Research has shown that structured interviews (i.e., those that are based on a job analysis, use anchored score guides, ask all candidates the same question, and use a panel of raters) are more valid than unstructured interviews (e.g., Campion, Pursell, Brown, 1988). Interviews that have been extensively studied in the literature are patterned descriptive behavior interviews (PBDI), situational interviews (SI) and conventional structured interviews (CSI). Each interview type is briefly defined as follows. PBDIs are past oriented and grounded in the belief that past behavior predicts future behavior (Janz, 1989). As such, they tend to ask questions such as “Can you think of a time when…?” or “Can you give me an example of where…?” SI’s are future oriented and grounded in the belief that one’s intentions are the best predictor of one’s future performance (Latham, Saari, Pursell, and Campion, 1980). As such, they ask questions such as “What would you do if…?” CSI’s are slightly less-structured in that score guides are often not used and neither future or past-oriented questions are presented. Hence, there are no ‘typical’ questions per se as these interviews focus on likes/dislikes, experiences, and preferences (Latham and Skarlicki, 1996).

Using a sample of 152 business students enrolled in a Human Resources Management course, we set out to investigate the extent to which there was a ‘gay’ bias in interviews. Participants were randomly assigned to a 3 (SI, PBDI, CSI) x 2 (gay applicant, heterosexual applicant) conditions. Videotapes of the same two male actors playing the roles of interviewer and interviewee were used. Study participants observed the video and assessed the applicant’s response to 7 questions using a 5-point scale.

A 3 (Interview type: SI, PBDI, CSI) x 2 (Applicant sexual orientation: gay, heterosexual) ANOVA was conducted on the interview score variable. Contrary to our expectations, the score of the gay applicant was not significantly lower than the heterosexual applicant (F=.09, p>.05, eta²=.00). However, a 2 (sexual orientation of applicant: gay, heterosexual) by 2 (gender of interviewer: male, female) ANOVA found an interaction effect (F=3.97, p<.05, eta²=.03) such that male participants (i.e., interviewers), relative to female participants, evaluated the gay applicant more negatively than the heterosexual applicant.

To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine, and find, a sexual orientation bias in interviews. Given the use of structured interviews, we can only assume that this bias would have been more prevalent in an unstructured conversational interview. As researchers have advocated the use of a panel of diverse (gender, race) interviewers (e.g., Latham et al., 1980) as a method of reducing race and gender bias, future research should now examine whether the use of a diverse gender panel could minimize the bias found in this study.

There are several limitations to this study. First, the study took place in a well-controlled setting involving students versus a real workplace setting. Hence, future research should test the extent to which the same findings hold true in an
organizational setting involving employees. Second, the participants were aware that they were in a study and a ‘social desirability’ bias may have caused them to minimize any gay bias. Third, 20 participants either ‘missed’ the cues concerning sexual orientation or incorrectly identified the sexual orientation of the applicant.