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ABSTRACT

        Two studies examined the effectiveness of a model
designed as an instructional aid in teaching college students how to
respond to potentially discriminatory employment interview questions.
Subjects in the first study, 91 students enrolled in communication
classes in a mid-size Wisconsin university who were told that they
would be asked to respond to potentially discriminatory questions and
99 similar students who were not told that they would be asked to
respond to potentially discriminatory questions, were instructed to
think about the type of job they would be seeking in the near future
and were asked to write how they would actually respond to a set of
six discriminatory questions. Subjects for the second study, 291
adults identified from the mailing lists of the continuing and adult
education division of a mid-size university in Alabama, were sent a
three-page questionnaire asking them to write exactly what they would
say if an interviewer asked them questions which, unknown to the
respondents, were discriminatory. Sixty-two surveys were returned,
for a response rate of 21.3%. Results indicated that although the
demographics for the student and non-student populations differed
considerably, the primary response strategy was the same--the
overwhelming response to potentially discriminatory questions was to
give the information requested, even when the subjects were told that
the questions were illegal. Findings suggest support for the model
for interviewee responses to impermissible interview questions.
(Three tables of data are included, and 17 references are attached.)
(RS)

I DON'T WANT TO ANSWER THAT!

A RESPONSE STRATEGY MODEL

FOR POTENTIALLY DISCRIMINATORY QUESTIONS

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Research shows that selection interviewers continue to ask
potentially illegal or impermissible questions. This paper
explores a full range of response strategies available to
interviewees and the likely reaction from interviewers. The
model was initially developed as an instructional aid and has
been validated and extended by both student and non-student
populations. The data point to the instructional need of
specific training for students in how to use face-saving and
compliance-gaining strategies in response to discriminatory
questions.

I Don't Want to Answer That!

A Response Strategy Model for Potentially Discriminatory Questions

Of the many communication events that pose anxiety for interactants, one that nearly everyone encounters is the job interview. Stress is a built-in characteristic of this event. For the interviewee, there's stress in: a) encountering a new situation and new people; b) saying and doing the "right" thing; and c) knowing that the performance is being evaluated by someone who can reward or punish by offering or not offering the job.

Compounding this inherently stressful situation, the interviewee knows that to get the job he/she may have to respond to questions that are: a) inappropriate; b) impermissible by law; or c) potentially discriminatory if used to make personnel selections. Unfortunately, a question that discriminates illegally has no objective definition. Federal legislation prohibits hiring practices, including selection interviews, that discriminate against certain protected classes. However, determination of discrimination occurs post facto when charges of alleged discrimination suits are settled in court. Often, case law prevails providing definitions of discrimination that vary according to judicial district and precedent. [See Springston & Keyton, 1989 for a discussion of EEO legislation and its effect on selection interviews.]

There is good evidence that job applicants' legal rights continue to be compromised in the selection process and that companies continue to ask impermissible questions long after equal employment opportunity legislation identifies discriminatory areas (see Chambers & Goldstein, 1986; Goodale, 1982; Jablin, 1982; Jablin & Tengler, 1982; Ledvinka, 1982; Scott, Pavlock, & Lathan, 1985; and Springston & Keyton, 1988a, 1989). Our students routinely tell us about the potentially illegal questions they are asked.

Given that legislation is in place to protect interviewees and that such questions continue to be asked, we believe we must empower interviewees with choices in their responses to potentially discriminating questions. How are applicants likely to respond when confronted with such questions? Will they give the answers to the questions and volunteer personal information? Or, are applicants knowledgeable about their rights and can determine inappropriate and discriminating areas of questions? Are applicants capable of diffusing or redirecting such questions?

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These are questions that beg exploration given the nature of
instruction individuals can find regarding job interviews. The popular
press books that dominate the "job hunting" or "career" sections of
bookstores often instruct the interviewee to "answer every question
honestly." Most authors do not even address the issue of discriminatory
questions.

Looking at academic texts on interviewing we found a wide array of
suggestions. None are documented with data. Stewart and Cash (1988)
suggest that interviewees judge the importance of the position they are
applying for and the severity of the EEO violation. They suggest that if a
serious EEO violation occurs during the selection interview process that
the best strategy is to refuse to answer the question and report the
interviewer to his/her superiors or the college placement center. If a
moderate EEO violation occurs and the interviewee is truly interested in
the job, a "tactful" refusal such as "I think age is irrelevant if you're
well qualified" (p. 158) is recommended. For mild or "innocent" EEO
violations, Stewart and Cash suggest that the interviewee attempt to
neutralize the problem or answer the question in such a way as to support
the interviewee's candidacy for the position. Examples include "I'm
looking forward to the challenges of both family and career. I've observed
many of my women professors and fellow workers handling both quite
successfully" and "My husband and I would discuss locational moves that
either of us might have to consider in the future" (p. 158).

Skopec (1986) points out that some interviewees make a point of
refusing to answer illegal questions. While it is likely that refusing to
answer would create an uncomfortable situation, he presents no evidence of
how this action would affect the chance of being offered a job. Skopec
continues:

> If the answer does not hurt your chances, it may be best to answer the
> question without calling attention to its impropriety. Alternatively,
> you can simply repeat the question, hoping that the interviewer will
> recognize the error and rephrase the question. Or you can answer the
> question that should have been asked. For example, if the interviewer
> asks, "Have you ever been arrested for a felony?" you can answer, "No,
> I have never been convicted of a felony." If none of these
> alternatives works for you, you may politely refuse to answer the
> question. Explain why you believe it is illegal and give the

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interviewer an opportunity to proceed without too much embarrassment.
(p. 72)

Having been in these interviewing situations, being able to "politely refuse" such questions called upon all the tact and manners we could muster given the circumstances. We failed. It's an easy thing to recommend, but difficult to do.

Sincoff and Goyer (1984) organize their eight response strategies into a list of eight. They are:

1. Acceptance without comment: Answer the question, even though you know it is probably unlawful.

2. Acceptance with comment: Point out that the question is probably unlawful but answer it anyway.

3. Confrontation: Meet the interviewer head-on by asking about the question's appropriateness.

4. Rationalization: Ignore a direct response to the question and point out your qualifications for the position.

5. Challenge: Make the interviewer tell you why this question is a BFOQ.

6. Redirection: Refer to an antecedent to shift the focus of the interview away from your age toward the requirements of the position itself.

7. Refusal: Say that you will not provide the information requested.

8. Withdrawal: Physically remove yourself from the interview. End the interview immediately and leave.

While providing a wide range of responses, Sincoff and Goyer present no data that establishes the validity or applicability of the responses. Further, they do not iscuss the implications of using these responses in response to discriminating questions in selection interviews.

Stewart and Cash (1988) address the problem discriminating questions present because whatever response strategy is chosen by the interviewee, consequences of that response must be considered.

If they answer unlawful questions honestly, they may lose positions for irrelevant and unlawful reasons. If they refuse to answer such questions, they may lose positions because they appear uncooperative, evasive, hostile or "one of those." There is no gracious way to refuse to answer a question. (p. 158)

While some of the interviewing texts provide advice, we really know

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very little about the interviewee's communication in selection interviews. Jablin (1988) report a previous study by Jablin and McComb that reviewed the interview literature. Of the studies investigating communication issues, the vast majority--70%--focused solely on interviewer communication while only 17% examined interviewee communication. Simply, we don't know what responses interviewees will use or would like to use when confronted with discriminatory questions.

Springston and Keyton (1988b) began to explore how job applicants might respond to such questions by developing a model of response strategies and then testing that model on both student and non-student populations.

PRESENTATION OF A RESPONSE STRATEGY MODEL

Springston and Keyton (1988b) present a model of the potential response strategies that interviewees can use. The model recognizes that selection of a response strategy depends upon several conditions. First, what is the perceived intent of the interviewer's question? Is the interviewer asking the question to enable him/her to solicit information from which he/she can discriminate against protected classes of people or is the interviewer naively asking the question? Second, what is the interviewee's desire to secure a job offer from that interview? Some interviewees may perceive that some jobs are worth having or some organizations are worth working for regardless of the personal costs incurred in the selection process. Factors external to the interviewee such as the interviewee's need to meet family or personal financial obligations or family or social pressure to get a job--any job--can create additional stress.

Third, the rapport the interviewer generates with the interviewee may cause the interviewee to not mind answering certain questions. For example, a female interviewee may reveal her plans for child care if a female interviewer explains how she maintains both household and career responsibilities. Additional elements are the interviewee's desire to maintain a favorable impression with the interviewer, and the interviewee's perception of his/her power in relation to the interviewer. Finally, an individual's personality and communication style must be considered. More assertive and aggressive individuals could find potentially discriminatory questions more offensive than someone who is more submissive or someone who

has a high regard for authority. Ultimately, these factors rest upon the ability of the interviewee to recognize that an interview question is personally intrusive, or potentially discriminating.

Based upon all of these factors the Springston and Keyton model provides several strategies for the interviewee. Each strategic response of the model is briefly described here.

Answering the Question or Yes, I'll Tell You

Of course in asking any question the interviewer hopes that the question will stimulate a direct answer from the interviewee. In most cases, interviewees also expect to respond directly to the questions so the interviewee simply gives the interviewer the information requested. Perhaps the interviewee (a) believes that responding to the question will put him/her in a more positive light with the interviewer, (b) is not bothered by the potentially discriminating effect of the question, or (c) is comfortable with the interviewer and does not want to ruin the chance of being selected by withholding information. Of course, the danger is that the interviewee is willingly providing the interviewer information that can be used to discriminate against him/her in making a selection or hiring decision.

Not Answering the Question

One alternative is to not answer the question. This can take three forms. From the interviewer's perspective, these types of responses show the interviewee's lack of concern for making a positive impression. From the interviewee's perspective, these strategies are not likely to lead to an employment opportunity.

Flat Refusal

Here, the interviewee responds "I won't/can't answer that question." Silence on the part of the interviewee at that point would indicate an unwillingness to indicate why he/she will not answer. The disadvantage clearly rests with the interviewee. Interviewers who are unaware they are asking a potentially discriminating question may conclude that the interviewee: a) is unable to answer the question; b) is being adamantly defiant; c) has an attitude that is unacceptable for that work environment; or d) is aware of his/her employment rights.

Putting the Interviewer on the Spot

Another abrupt response is stating bluntly that the question is highly illegal and asking the interviewer for his/her name. The interviewee

continues "It's interesting that your company uses such questions as a basis for hiring. I expect to file a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission because you discriminate on an illegal basis" (Hanna & Wilson, 1988, p. 222). This strategy, of course, will terminate the interview, and, in all but the rarest of cases, extinguish the interviewee's chance for being hired/selected.

It's None of Your Business

When asked a potentially discriminatory question, an interviewee may be so angered that he/she replies "It's none of your business." This is another interview terminating strategy, but one that may be appropriately selected if the interviewee is bothered enough by the question to not care about the job/organization.

Diffusing the Question or Answering the Concern of the Question

The third major option is for the interviewee to diffuse the question or only answer the concern of the question. The strategy here is to redirect the focus of the question, put the interviewer on notice that he/she is trespassing into illegal, impermissible, or inappropriate areas of questioning, or give the interviewee time to think of how to respond.

Show Me It's Legal and I'll Respond

In the "show me it's legal" strategy the unwillingness to answer is supported with reasoning. The interviewee can say: 1) "If you'll show me how that information relates to the job I'm applying for, I'll be glad to respond;" or 2) "If you're referring to a qualification that pertains to this job, I'll be glad to answer." Unfortunately, the interviewer is likely to perceive the interviewee negatively if the interviewer is not aware that the question he/she asked is potentially discriminating. These responses still put the interviewee in a combative stance with the interviewer if the interviewer believes that the interviewee is challenging his/her knowledge.

That's a Personal Question and Why Do You Ask?

These strategies are similar in that: 1) the interviewee does not answer the question, and 2) they serve to continue the interview. To a potentially discriminatory question, the interviewee may respond "That's a personal question. I'd be happy to answer any questions about my qualifications" (Hanna & Wilson, 1988, p. 221). The "why do you ask?" strategy has the interviewee responding "I'm not sure how these questions pertain to my qualifications. I'm of course willing to answer any question

you'd like to ask about my training or experience" (Hanna & Wilson, 1988, p. 221). In both, the interviewee is not willing to give information that may be discriminatory, but is showing a more favorable stance toward continuing the interview. The interviewee is also cautioning the interviewer that he/she is trespassing into an impermissible or sensitive area of questioning.

Thanks For The Concern

This response strategy puts the interviewee in even more positive light. Here, the interviewee responds with "I appreciate your concern for my background or any personal problem I might have. I would like to be considered for the job on the basis of my work qualifications." It is likely that the interviewer would respond with a discussion of why that information is necessary or drop the line of questioning. As a general rule, we recommend this strategy. Spoken with non-defensive nonverbal cues, this response is likely to be the safest if an interviewee believes the interviewer is asking for potentially discriminating information.

You May Be Concerned

Here the interviewee responds to a potentially discriminatory question by saying "You may be concerned that I'll miss work because of my children. I want to assure you that I am a professional person and will be responsible" (Wilson, 1988). The interviewee is speaking directly to the concern that the interviewer may have but not directly answering the question (that is: Who will take care of your children while you work?). However, the interviewee is clearly admitting that he/she has children.

Testing of the Model

The model was designed as an instructional aid in teaching college students how to respond to employment interview questions. The issue of discriminatory questions is frequently raised in both interviewing and organizational communication courses. A two-part project was developed to test the model's representativeness of potential interviewee responses.

STUDY 1

Methodology

Students enrolled in communication classes in a mid-size Wisconsin university were the subjects for this study. They were divided into two groups: a) subjects told that that they would be asked to respond to questions that were potentially discriminating; and b) subjects not told

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that the questions were potentially discriminatory. There were 91 subjects in the first group and 99 in the second group. Demographic information and information about the subjects' employment seeking situation was collected.

Each subject was given six potentially discriminatory questions identified by Springston and Keyton (1988a) as being frequently asked in interviews. Subjects were told that these questions might be asked in an employment interview situation. These six questions are prohibited by Wisconsin state law and therefore are not relevant in any job interview unless specified by a BFOQ. The likelihood of these questions being permitted under a BFOQ ruling is quite low. The questions were:

1. Have you ever been arrested for a crime?
2. Do you have any future plans for marriage and children?
3. Do you have any handicaps?
4. What is your age?
5. Do you think your race will cause you any problems on this job?
6. Do you have any religious beliefs that would prohibit you from working certain days during the week?

While federal legislation does not specifically point to questions about arrest records (Question 1) as being discriminatory, it has been shown that certain minority groups are more likely to have arrest records. Thus, asking a question that focuses on arrests rather than felony convictions may discriminate against certain groups. Question 2 is most likely to discriminate against women, but can be used to discriminate against either sex or according to marital status. With regard to handicaps, question 3 is negligent in that it asks for a blanket response without considering the job the applicant is applying for. Asking a person's age or birth date (Question 4) can provide a basis for age discrimination. Question 5 asks if the applicant's race will cause problems on the job. According to federal legislation, asking questions that determine, identify, or distinguish race is clearly discriminatory. While an applicant's ability to meet work schedules is necessary information from the organizational perspective, Question 6 asks for the information in such a way that the answer could provide a basis for discrimination according to religious belief or ethnic group membership.

Subjects were instructed to think about the type of job they would be seeking in the near future. Given that context, they were asked to write how they would <u>actually respond,</u> rather than how they would <u>like to respond,</u> to each of the six questions. Subjects were given class time to write their responses. A total of 1,140 responses were received.

After all subjects responded, they were asked to indicate if they were aware that the questions were potentially illegal discriminators. Fifteen from the subject group who were not told that the questions were potentially discriminating acknowledged that they knew these questions could be discriminating. Therefore, responses of these 15 subjects were added to the first group resulting in 106 subjects who knew the questions were impermissible and 84 who did not. Table 1 displays the demographic and employment status data.

Results

Keeping the responses of the two subject groups separate, one researcher categorized the responses. He identified 16 response strategies for those subjects who were aware that the questions were discriminatory and 6 response strategies for those subjects who were not aware. Without knowledge of this categorization scheme, the second researcher sorted the responses into categories. A seventh category for unaware subjects was added. The two coders achieved 98% coding reliability responses for aware subjects and 96% coding reliability for unaware subjects. The response strategies and the number of responses per strategy are presented in Table 2. The three main categories of responses were: a) direct response to the question (86.58%), b) some strategic response to diffuse the question or answer the concern of the question (6.14%); and c) not answering the question (7.19%).

Because there was a large percentage of responses from both groups of subjects indicating that the subject would simply tell the interviewer what he/she wanted to know, the researchers more closely evaluated those items. After telling the interviewer what he/she wanted to know, some subjects parenthetically indicated that some other thought was simultaneously occurring. Almost seven percent of subject responses also included parenthetical comments.

One researcher identified the "Yes, I'll Tell You" responses that included parenthetical information. We believe these responses indicate that an intrapersonal process was also occurring that could ultimately affect the outcome of the interview, the interviewee's willingness to continue the interview, or the interviewee's desire to accept an employment offer. For the aware responses, the first researcher sorted those responses into 10 categories. Independently, the second researcher made

Table 1

Demographic Data

| Item | Study 1 | | Study 2 |
	Subjects Aware *n=106	Subjects Unaware *n=84	*n=62
Sex:			
Male	39	25	9
Female	67	59	50
Marital Status:			
Married	3	2	37
Single	100	79	
Not married	1	3	16
Family Status:			
Parent	9	4	45
Race:			
Black	0	0	2
Asian	2	0	
Latin American	0	2	
Native American	17	9	
Other	71	59	59
Handicap:	1	3	0
Student Status:			
Full-time student	101	79	3
Part-time student	4	4	12
Age:			
18-22	90	74	3
23-29	11	5	7
30-39	3	4	15
40-49	1	1	20
50-59			8
60+			6
Employment Status:			
Looking/part-time job	38	36	14
Looking/full-time job	67	42	44
Other	5	6	0

*Because of double answering or failure to answer, the totals by category may not reflect subject totals.

the same sort. Reliability of matched codings was .69. After discussion, the researchers achieved 100% agreement in the sorting process by consolidating and renaming categories. Nine categories were retained for the aware responses. For the unaware responses, the first researcher sorted the items into 17 categories. The second researcher independently made the same sort to achieve a coding reliability of .85. After

Table 2

Subject Response Strategies

Study 1 Responses		Study 2 Responses	
Aware n=636	Unaware n=504	n=372	Response Strategy

----------Answering the Question----------			
519	468	323	Yes, I'll tell you.
----------Diffusing the Question or---------- Answering the Concern of the Question			
1		1	You may be concerned . . . . Thanks for the concern.
8	3	1	This question is not relevant.
8	4		Here is my answer; why do you ask?
8	13		What is the relevance?
2			That's a personal question.
7	3		I am qualified.
2	4		Returns the question to interviewer.
1			Will my answer affect my chances of being hired?
1			If my response would make a difference, I wouldn't want to work here.
			Show me it's legal.
5			That's illegal to ask, but I will answer anyway.
----------Not Answering the Question----------			
3			Did you know that is an illegal question?
8			I don't have to/want to answer; this question is illegal.
3			Terminates the interview.
2		1	Wisecrack.
55	10	23	Flat refusal/no comment.
		1	It's none of your business.
1			Puts the interviewer on the spot.
----------Uncodable/lost----------			
4	1	18	

discussion, the deletion of one category, and the addition of two categories, the researchers completely agreed in the sorting of these responses into 18 categories. Additionally, the researchers coded the parenthetical comments with regard to their favorableness, neutrality, or unfavorableness toward the interviewer. Table 3 shows the parenthetical

comments.

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Table 3

Parenthetical Comments

for "Yes, I'll Tell You" Responses

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----- Study 1 ------		Study 2	
Responses Aware n=39	Responses Unaware n=34	n=40	Intrapersonal Response Strategy
-----Favorable Strategies toward Interviewer/Organization-----			
	1		Must be some reason for asking.
1	1		Important for interviewer to know this information.
-----Neutral Strategies toward Interviewer/Organization-----			
	1		I answered, but I don't have to.
	1		I'll give a vague answer.
	2		Things I'm thinking about.
1	1		Answer how the interviewer wants.
	1		Answer depends on disposition of interviewer.
11	6		No reason not to answer.
	3		Smile/act interested.
	1		Laugh.
2			Interviewer would find out anyway.
3	3		Answer succinctly/do not elaborate.
-----Unfavorable Strategies toward Interviewer/Organization-----			
3	1	4	I'm concealing information.
	5		Feel surprise/discomfort/nervous.
	1		This question is too easy to say yes or no.
	1		I'm offended.
8		30	I know it's illegal to ask.
7		6	Wonder why the interviewer asked this question?
3			Wisecrack.
	3		It's not appropriate to ask.
	1		It's not their business.
-----------------------------Uncodable-------------------------			
	1		

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STUDY 2

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Methodology

A limitation of Study 1 is that the subjects are students. Although students frequently enter the job market for both part-time and full-time jobs, their view of economic and occupation reality may be different than

that of a non-student population. A non-student population was used in this second study to continue to validate the model.

The mailing lists from the continuing and adult education division of a mid-size university in Alabama were used in the second study. The mailing list represented 1,753 persons who had taken courses in the division's evening non-credit adult courses. From this list, approximately 17% of names were pulled for a sample of 291 names to use in a mail survey. All but one of the names had an Alabama address. The other state was Mississippi. It was assumed that respondents would be placed in interviewing situations that would be subject to prevailing federal legislation; these states do not have more restrictive EEO legislation.

A three-page survey questionnaire and a pre-paid postage envelope was mailed with a cover letter to the subjects. The cover letter indicated that the researcher was interested in how individuals respond to employment interview questions. The questionnaire included basic demographic questions as well as questions designed to secure job-status and job-seeking information. A return rate of 21.3% was achieved as 62 of the surveys were returned.

Subjects were asked to assume they were in the job interview situation they identified. They were asked to write exactly what they would say if an interviewer asked them the following questions:

1. What does your husband/wife do for a living?
2. We only want to hire people who can grow and prosper with the company. How many years do you plan to work before retiring?
3. Who will take care of your children while you're at work?
4. Do you hold any religious beliefs that would prevent you from working certain days of the week?
5. I'd guess that you're about 24/35/45/55. Being your age, how do you think you'd fit in with our employees who are older/younger than you?
6. Have you ever been arrested of a crime?

Nowhere on the questionnaire or on the cover letter was there any indication that these questions asked for information that could provide an employer with a basis for making an illegal discriminatory hiring decision.

None of the six questions are totally job relevant; each asks for personal information. Questions 1 and 3 relate to marital and parental status and can be discriminatory even if asked of all applicants of both sexes. Answers to questions 2 and 5 can provide potential age discrimination information. Responses to question 4 can give information that will allow discrimination based on religious beliefs and ethnic group membership. Responses to question 6 can discriminate against racial and

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minority groups. Questions 4 and 6 are a direct replication of questions asked in the first study. Because age and marital/family (sex) discrimination are two of the highest reported types of alleged discrimination in hiring practices (U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1985), two questions were asked for each of those categories.

Results

Demographically, these subjects differ significantly from the student population used in the first study. Table 1 displays all of the demographic and employment-seeking status data. The written responses to the six questions were categorized as the responses in Study 1. Of the 372 responses, 86.83% were of the "Yes, I'll Tell You" direct answer category. Less than 1% of the responses were categorized as answering the concern of the question or diffusing the question. Some subjects (6.72%) simply elected not to give an answer to the question. This may suggest that they acknowledged the potentially discriminatory or inappropriate nature of the question. Table 2 displays the data. Of the "Yes, I'll Tell You" responses, 10.7% were identified as having parenthetical comments. Table 3 displays the parenthetical response strategy data.

DISCUSSION

These data support the Springston and Keyton (1988b) model for interviewee responses to impermissible interview questions. With respect to demographics, the non-student population differed markedly from the student population. However, this difference did not alter subjects' primary response strategy choice. Clearly, in both subject groups, the overwhelming response to potentially illegally discriminating interview questions is to give the information requested. This is the case even when the interviewee has knowledge that the question is illegal.

This suggests that job applicants generally assume powerless and compliant postures in interview situations and feel that they must answer whatever questions interviewers pose. One subject's parenthetical comment illustrates this: "If I was conducting an interview I wouldn't ask these questions, but as an interviewee I'll answer them."

When subjects were aware that the questions were impermissible, response strategies covered a broader and more assertive range of responses. When the subjects were unaware and had to rely upon their own knowledge of illegal/impermissible areas of questioning, their responses

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were more submissive as they complied with information requests. Two factors could account for this. One is that those subjects who were told that they would be responding to discriminatory questions were directly alerted and that point was more cognizant for them. This may have triggered some anger or resentment. Second, knowledge that the questions were discriminatory may have empowered the subjects with more freedom to respond. They may have realized that they were not as constrained in their response choices and that one of their choices was to not answer.

Most frequently, subjects (86.64%) would illingly answer the questions. These data are similar to the findings of a Roper Poll (1987) that asked people what information a business corporation had a right to know about a person they are considering hiring. In the poll, 84% responded that potential employers had a right to know their date of birth; 53% indicated that organizations had a right to know their race; and 22% indicated that organizations had a right to know their religion. Even in Study 1 when subjects were aware that responses to the questions could provide a basis for illegal discrimination, 81.6% gave the requested information. We believe this percentage is particularly high when knowledge that the questions were discriminatory should have given the subjects some additional confidence to respond more assertively. We must recognize, of course, that knowledge that the question is potentially discriminating may not always translate into knowledge of how to diffuse the question.

The second most frequently mentioned (7.08%) category was "not answering the question." The strategies using face-saving and compliance-gaining techniques to diffuse the question were mentioned least often (4.76%).

We interpret these findings to indicate that a deficiency exists in training interviewees how to answer questions with responses that do not: a) compromise personal information; b) reveal potentially discriminating information; and c) lead to the premature termination of the interview. We believe that the extreme results indicate that subjects believe they must answer any question posed to them without regard for their own personal interests or legal protection.

We believe that the middle ground strategies ("You may be concerned," "Thanks for the concern," and "Why do you ask?") would be received favorably by most interviewers (we are currently directing a project that

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asks organizational interviewers to evaluate these types of responses). Although the interviewer desires a straightforward response, the middle ground strategies can serve as ways to deflect the question and still serve to continue the interview. Continuing the interview should be a foremost objective of the interviewee unless he/she is so offended by the question that he/she decides that this type of question indicates future trouble with this organization and that termination of the interview is desired. Since so few subjects responded in the middle ground, it may imply that subjects need practice in voicing these strategies. Having the knowledge to respond with varying strategies may give the interviewee the power he/she needs to take more control.

An unsuspected finding is that some subjects directly responded to the questions and further indicated that other cognitive processes were occurring. These types of responses may be more representative of the "Yes, I'll tell you" category than we know. (We did not ask for this additional information.) Although, the interviewer is getting the information desired, the applicant is aware that the questioning has trespassed on his/her rights. The intrapersonal process may impact an applicant's desire to join an organization or his/her impression of the organization. We certainly have no way of knowing if other subjects who responded directly to the questions also had other thoughts about the questions and neglected to write those down.

Overall, the responses listed in Tables 2 and 3 suggest that "strategy" is the correct label for interview question responses and that some interviewees do think ahead or wonder afterward about the impact of their response. Whether these same subjects would enact these strategies in a face-to-face interview situation is unknown. But these strategies suggest that nearly one-fifth of the subjects' responses are not as direct as the interviewer would prefer.

These data show that the original Springston and Keyton (1988b) model is realistic for interviewees. However, the data suggest additions. Generally, the additional categories more specifically revealed the motivation and intent of the interviewee. The three main types of response strategies--"Yes, I'll Answer," "Diffuse the Question" or "Answer the Concern of the Question," and "Not Answering the Question"--remain intact.

The study has some limiting factors--generally imposed by the context of investigation. We know of no way to gain access to job applicants

without standing outside the door of the interview rcom--a scenario no organization would find appealing. Responses collected in this methodology may not reflect the responses interviewees give in actual interview situations. Written responses can never take the place of face-to-face interaction, but we believe that these written responses certainly indicate that the model is valid and training in alternative response patterns is necessary. Having the opportunity to write their responses may have increased subjects' ability to create additional strategies and give us insight into strategies that subjects would like to play out given the social permission to do so. While we could have had subjects role-play the situation with us, we see little advantage in that technique over the written responses for our purposes.

Students can be perceived to be a limitation when used as subjects. If our intent is to reverse the typical information revealing response, then students are just the population we should aim our efforts toward as they comprise a large majority of the interviewee population. A further benefit to training students would hopefully be the carry-over effect when they become organizational interviewers. Also related to student subjects, part-time versus full-time job seeking status may affect the type of response used. Perhaps responding to a discriminatory question is not "such a big deal" when the interviewee considers the work to be part-time or temporary. The types of issues raised in discriminatory questions may be more salient for interviewees seeking full-time professional positions. Our second study with a non-student population confirmed the results of the first: most job applicants will respond to most questions posed by interviewers.

SUMMARY

These data suggest that more adequate training is necessary. As instructors of interviewing and organizational communication courses, we should address the issue of discriminatory interview questions from both the perspective of the interviewer and the interviewee. From the organizational and interviewer perspective, we should continue to stress that the best defense against potential litigation is to avoid asking questions that trespass against protected classes or to reword questions to avoid problem areas. For example, the question "Do you have any religious beliefs that would prohibit you from working certain days during the week?" should be rephrased in this non-discriminatory way: "Do you have any

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problems in meeting the work schedule?."

A recent District Court case determined that intent was not what defined discriminatory hiring practices; the effect of the hiring practice is the issue of interest. Thus, charges of discriminatory hiring practices can also be levied against an organization if an interviewer: 1) trespasses into areas of questioning that are illegal, impermissible, or inappropriate without having knowledge that he/she is doing so; or 2) asks personal questions to give the applicant an opportunity to "warm up" to the interview setting or interviewer without intending to use that information in hiring decisions.

Even though we should continue to adequately train future organizational interviewers, we should be aware that such training in and of itself cannot remove the presence of discriminatory questions from all selection interviews. Thus, we need to teach students how to respond to such questions in such a way that the primary objectives of continuing with the interview and not revealing personal or potentially discriminating information are both achieved. This is especially important as a recent Supreme Court decision has shifted the burden of proof back to the interviewee. We believe that response strategies that diffuse the question or answer the concern of the question without revealing specific information are the best ways to approach discriminatory questions.

It appears that the two parties in the selection interview--the interviewer and the interviewee--have different and sometimes conflicting objectives even though the selection interview may be the only opportunity to exchange information. Reality suggests that we are never going to have the "perfect" interview as commonly perceived by both the interviewer and the interviewee. But as long as the selection interview provides the first defining link between employer and employee, we should strive to do all we can to make it better.

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