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The Effects of Physical Backgrounds in Technology-Mediated Interviews on Perceptions of
Employment Suitability

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ABSTRACT

Technology-mediated interviews have become one of the primary interviewing tools for talent acquisition. However, previous studies have been relatively limited to examine the physical contextual environment of interviewees. As a step toward understanding the relationship between physical contextual factors and perceptions of employment suitability, this research focused on the effects of physical backgrounds and background tidiness of interview applicants on perceptions of employment suitability in technology-mediated interviews, where a sample of 309 hiring managers evaluated hypothetical job candidates' profiles. The post hoc results demonstrated that there were significant job candidates gender interaction effects on the perception of competence. Notably, when a relatively tidy room is evaluated, female interviewees are more negatively weighted than male interviewees regarding perceived competence. However, when an untidy room is evaluated, female interviewees are weighted more favorably than male interviewees, in part because untidy features activate a positive counter stereotype. Furthermore, the results indicated that female interviewees are evaluated as less competent than male interviewees in a kitchen that coincides with female stereotypes.

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“We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.”

-Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere’s Fan*

Chapter 1

Introduction

Without a doubt, the job interview is an integral part of the employee selection process (Salgado & Moscoso, 2002). In organizations worldwide, the job interview is the most commonly used methods to evaluate job candidates (Wilk & Cappelli, 2003). Recruiters adopt interviews as a selection tool to determine job candidates' skills, experience, and personality. The interview process provides both hiring managers and job candidates with a dynamic environment where they can communicate and interact face-to-face. In fact, it creates perhaps the only personal opportunity for interviewers and applicants to exchange information with one another (Eder & Harris, 1989). Moreover, research has found that the interview is the most preferred assessment method for supervisors and applicants (Topor et al., 2007). Despite the modest validity of interviews, organizations of all kinds are still systematically and tirelessly using job interviews to select employees (Eder & Harris, 1989; Schmidt & Rader, 1999).

While traditionally employment interviews have been conducted live and in-person, virtual interviews are becoming increasingly popular in the workplace. A virtual interview is an interview conducted remotely through technological means. The virtual interview technique began to emerge in the early 2000s but became routine in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic when a large proportion of the workforce moved to the virtual workplace (George et al., 2020). Even though virtual interviews are unlikely to replace live face-to-face interviews completely, virtual interviews will likely continue to be a significant component of employers' selection systems.

In addition to the benefits such as social distancing, several other benefits have led to the popularity of virtual interviews. Previous research has discussed technology-mediated interviews that serve as a way to help organizations reduce hiring costs and increase efficiency (Joshi et al., 2020). Virtual interviews reduce costs such as transportation, hotels, meals, and other expenses associated with placing recruiters on recruiting sites (Champman & Webster, 2003). Moreover, the increasing globalization of the economy and labor market encourages organizations to look for the best employees internationally. Technology-mediated interviews allow companies to simultaneously mitigate the geographic dispersal of job candidates and expand applicant pools. Although technology-mediated interviews are unlikely to completely replace live face-to-face interviews, they will continue to be a major component of employers' selection tools.

One unique aspect of technology-mediated interviews relative to traditional onsite interviews is that interviewees and interviewers do not share the same physical space. Unlike face-to-face interviews, the interviewer and interviewee conduct virtual interviews in different physical spaces connected by technology. Due to the difference in physical space, interviewers can observe types of environmental and contextual factors based on the background information provided by the candidate to the image provided via the webcam. For example, interviewees can easily reveal their living and working spaces through virtual interviews.

Interview background is a new contextual attribute available to the hiring managers in a technology-mediated interview setting. Presumably, hiring managers will make judgments and evaluations on candidates based on information provided by the applicant. The varying interview backgrounds may to some extent influence hiring managers' judgments since backgrounds are relatively novel content in the employee selection process. As well, candidates' backgrounds

differ, which serves as a means of determining who they are. While virtual backgrounds may influence hiring managers; decision-making, previous research has yet to examine this issue.

As a step toward understanding the impact of background on perceptions of employment suitability, this research will focus on two aspects of virtual backgrounds. First, we will examine room types, such as bedrooms, living rooms, and kitchens. This research will then focus on the tidiness of these rooms. In the same way that how hiring managers perceive job candidates may be influenced by their attire and physical appearance (Hosoda et al., 2003; Workman, 1984), interviewees' physical backgrounds may also affect their perception. The goal of this study is to facilitate job candidates to become successful in conducting virtual interviews and add an effective contextual factor for hiring managers to consider when screening future employees. The results of this study will provide insights into contextual factors for hiring managers to implement their hiring decisions and will provide guidance for job candidates to succeed in virtual interviews.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Over the past century, the employment interview has continuously been a popular topic among researchers (Buckley, Norris & Wiese, 2000). In a recent narrative review, Macan (2009) thoroughly summarized three main areas that have received a large amount of research (Macan, 2009). Many major findings in interview research focus to understand how interview structures affect the reliability and validity of interview judgments. Also, a considerable amount of literature suggests various measurements of interview constructs. The last main area that receives extensive research attention is the variety of applicant factors and characteristics.

One of the major findings of the previous research is that the judgment of interviewers based on structured interviews is more predictive of job performance than unstructured interviews (Macan, 2009). In fact, many quantitative and qualitative employment interview studies have concluded that the addition of structure to the interview process can enhance the reliability and validity of interviewer evaluations (Conway et al., 1995; Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994). Typically, the structured interview is defined in terms of the standardization of interview questions and response scoring (Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994). That is, a structured interview aims to ensure that the same interview questions are presented in the same order.

The methods of the structured interviews measurement vary among researchers historically in previous studies. Conway et al. (1995) initially provided a framework that interviews can be coded according to five progressively levels of question standardization. Dipbooy et al. (2004) proposed a three-dimensional model of the interview that conceptualized interview structure (Dipbooye, Wooten & Halverson, 2004). In addition, research also investigates

three significant components that enhance interview structure. First, establishing a standardized process of evaluation and scoring guides is beneficial for interview reliability and validity. Second, note-taking by interviewers is another major component of the structured interview process. Note-taking serves to improve memory and may be necessary for legal reasons (Middendorf & Macan, 2002). Third, utilizing panel interviewers, also referred to as team interviews, containing two or more interviewers are another means of increasing interview structure. Although structured interviews have been proven to have high reliability and validity in many aspects, research indicates structured interviews are actually infrequently used among human resources professionals. The reasons are attributed to the individual differences of interviewers and the potential of losing informality and time demands (Lievens & Depaepe, 2004).

Furthermore, researchers have sought to study the constructs measured in the employment interview. The major constructs examined include measures such as cognitive ability and the Big Five personality dimensions (Macan, 2009). Research has shown correlations between interviews, cognitive ability scores, the level of interview structure, and interview content. In particular, a high interview structure tended to result in lower interview-cognitive test correlations (Macan, 2009). Additional studies have found that low-complexity jobs result in higher correlation with cognitive ability (Huffcutt, Roth & McDaniel, 1996). Previous findings also provided evidence that personality plays a critical role in interviews. Perhaps personality traits and social skills are the most frequently measured constructs among interview studies (Macan, 2009). Across a variety of jobs, interviewers mentioned all Big Five personalities in their reports, but more specifically on Agreeableness (24.5%) and Extraversion (22.4%) (van Dam, 2003). However, research has not shown a direct correlation between interview ratings and

self-reported Big Five personality dimensions. Thus, the tendency of personality measurement through an interview is largely contingent upon the interpersonal skills of interviewees and how much they are allowed to act through the interview process (Macan, 2009).

From the past studies, interview applicants' demographic data significantly impact the interviewer's judgment. The variety of applicant factors and characteristics, including the applicants' race, gender, and age have received close attention in previous research. Even though there is no evidence of interview gender or racial differences in interview ratings was found (Sacco et al., 2003), potential discrimination may exist as workplace diversity is increasing. As Prukiss et al. (2006) study findings on implicit bias suggests that applicants with ethnic names and corresponding accents received lower interview ratings. Also, from Saks & McCarthey's study (2006), applicants reacted negatively when interviewers asked discriminatory questions (e.g., handicaps and plans for marriage and children). The effects of applicant age on the interview process have well studied, and research has found that age stereotypes may affect interview outcomes in less structured situations (Morgeson et al. 2008). In addition to applicant characteristics, researchers have found the interview performance of applicants is influenced by applicant behaviors. The interview evaluation and interviewer's judgment are greatly affected by what applicants say and do in an interview (Higgins & Judge, 2004). From previous studies, applicants typically used more self-promotion or self-focused impression management tactics when responding to experience-based questions and more ingratiation or other-focused impression management tactics when responding to interview questions (Proost et al., 2010).

While traditional face-to-face interviews are a mainstream employee selection method, the use of technology such as video and phone became more common for organizations to

conduct employment interviews is becoming increasingly prevalent. Technology-mediated interviews first emerged in the early 2000s. Typically, a technology-mediated interview refers to an evaluative, synchronous interaction with two parties by utilizing technology such as telephone, video, or online chat (Blacksmith, Willford & Behrend, 2016). One of the earliest studies on technology-mediated interviews can be traced back to 2000. Silvester et al. (2000) examined the comparison of interview ratings between telephone and face-to-face selection interviews in graduate recruitment. Their findings indicated that job candidates received significantly lower interview ratings when the telephone served as the interview mediation. As technology has continued to advance, large-scale use of personal computers and the popularization of the Internet have multiplied the development of technology-mediated interviews.

Compared with face-to-face interviews, technology-mediated interviews have apparent practical advantages. Using synchronized video technology can be more convenient, efficient, and economical than face-to-face. Especially during the global pandemic, videoconference interviews have been used increasingly as an alternative to face-to-face interviews to reduce personal contact (Melchers et al., 2021). Technology-mediated interviews also allow organizations to obtain a more diverse group of applicants (Bauer et al., 2004). Although the use of technology-mediated interviews is increasingly popular, technology may unintentionally affect the validity and reliability of the interview and introduce systematic sources of variance (Howard & Ferris, 1996; Potosky, 2008).

For some time, researchers have focused on how technology affects applicant reactions and interviewer ratings (Basch et al., 2020; Blackman, 2002; Chapman et al., 2003; Straus, Miles

& Levesque, 2001). A recent meta-analysis (Blacksmith, Willford & Behrend, 2016) examined 12 studies in a total of 16 articles. Blacksmith et al.'s (2016) study demonstrated that interview ratings and applicant reactions could be influenced by technological characteristics. Results indicate that interview ratings are lower in technology-mediated interviews and applicant reactions are less favorable in technology-mediated interviews (Blacksmith et al., 2016). Technology-mediated interviews have performed poorly in interviewer ratings and applicant reactions; this may be based on several reasons. For example, applicants' may also encounter difficulties in terms of performing social skills and eye contact (Blacksmith et al., 2016). The variance of interview context may lead to changes in the applicant's behavior, thus, it can directly affect the ratings (Potosky, 2008). From one perspective, it is possible that the use of technical intermediaries will increase ratings because they can reduce respondents' anxiety by eliminating the pressure associated with face-to-face interviews (Chapman & Rowe, 2001). However, previous studies (Shermis & Lombard, 1998) indicate that the use of technical media in the selection process can cause anxiety.

The use of technology can also generate numerous characteristics that influence how applicants perceive the interview process. Several characteristics and attributes in technology-mediated interviews may have a negative impact on the applicant's response (DeGroot & Gooty, 2009; Doherty-Sneddon et al., 1997; Swider et al., 2011). As mentioned above, removing visual and audio clues that appear in face-to-face interviews may make applicants less comfortable with impression management. Telephone interviews only allow audio communication, which prevents applicants from using non-verbal techniques such as smiling, professional presence, or handshake (Stewart et al., 2008). These restrictions may also have a negative impact on perceptions of procedural fairness (Guchait et al., 2014). In addition, the applicant views, that

they are not given enough opportunities to perform which can lead to feelings of frustration or consume more energy with the interviewer (Bauer et al., 2011; Chapman et al., 2003).

One of the main characteristics of technology-mediated interviews is that impression management tactics are often different from face-to-face interviews. Impression management refers to a conscious or subconscious process in which people attempt to influence other people's views on a person, an object, or an event by adjusting and controlling the information in social interaction (Sanaria, 2016; Schlenker, 1980). In face-to-face job interviews, ingratiation and self-promotion tactics are often used to acquire and promote favorable impressions. Ingratiation tactics are defined as behaviors that are designed to evoke interpersonal liking and attraction (Wortman & Linsenmeier, 1977). Self-promotion tactics are a bit different from ingratiation tactics in that they are behaviors intended to evoke attributions of competence rather than attractiveness (Gardner & Martinko, 1988; Godfrey, Jones, & Lord, 1986). Often, impression management results in certain behaviors, including the use of verbal statements, nonverbal or expressive behaviors, integrated behavior patterns (e.g., favor rendering), and modification of one's physical appearance (Schneider, 1981). However, technology limits the interviewers' ability to observe nonverbal behavior and other related cues, hindering impression management strategies (Barrick et al., 2012; Chapman and Rowe, 2001). For example, nonverbal cues are limited, and therefore applicants cannot adjust their responses based on the interviewers' facial cues. There is also the potential that poor Internet connections may interrupt communication. In video-based interviews, verbal communication can be frustrating as there may be a time lag (Wegge, 2006). Moving some of these clues may affect how the interviewer draws inferences, thereby increasing or decreasing the interviewer's rating (Chapman & Rowe, 2001; DeGroot & Motowidlo, 1999; Howard and Ferris, 1996). This is concerning, as applicants rely on

impression management techniques to maintain control of how they are perceived by interviewers.

One factor which may be considered an impression management tactic, which has not been examined in the previous research, is the physical background in which job candidates present themselves in virtual interviews. The physical background is not factored in face-to-face interviews because the interviewers and the interviewees are presented in the same proximity. Moreover, in face-to-face interviews, the interview locations and venues are likely to be selected by the interviewers. However, in technology-mediated interviews, the interviewers and the interviewees are in different physical spaces, and the interviewees can decide where they will be situated for the interviews. Given that interviewees may be in a variety of physical settings, backgrounds may become salient and direct the interviewer's attention. As such, backgrounds may influence interviewers' judgments about interviewees and perceptions of their employment suitability. As highlighted above, the impact of physical backgrounds in technology-mediated interviews has not been examined before, thus, the purpose of the present study.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Backgrounds & Hypotheses

The focus of this study is to determine the impact of physical backgrounds in technology-mediated interviews on the perceptions of employment suitability. Specifically, various room types including living rooms, bedrooms, and kitchens will be examined. In addition, this study seeks to determine whether room tidiness will have an influence on interviewer evaluations in technology-mediated interviews. Because room type and tidiness may influence the perceptions of an individual's professionalism, such backgrounds may influence how interviewers evaluate job candidates.

A large body of research suggests that the physical environment in professional and organizational work settings is associated with job satisfaction and job performance (Spreckelmeyer, 1993; Elsbach & Pratt, 2007). Physical elements such as enclosures and barriers, flexible work arrangements, personalized workspaces, and ambient surroundings in the workplace are found directly and routinely associated with organizational life and cause both positive and negative effects on worker perception (Elsbach & Pratt, 2007). For example, nature-like work surroundings can provide positive impressions to observers. Ridout, Ball, and Killerby (2002) found that the presence of wood furniture and flooring in an office led to a more favorable impression of the office occupant because wood is considered high quality and expensive furnishing, linked to high status.

Research on servicescape shows that physical environment matters, lending support that it is likely to matter in virtual interviews. Drawing from a marketing concept, Bitner's servicescape model indicates that the physical surroundings, including signs, symbols, artifacts,

and spatial layout stimulate external marketing goals and internal organizational goals (Bitner, 1992). Environmental settings influence perceptions of service quality and produce specific emotional effects and behavioral responses (Williams & Dargel, 2004). The servicescape not only indicates the expected service quality but also significantly influences customers' evaluations of factors determining perceived service quality. In addition, the service landscape has also been studied in the Internet environment which is called cyberscape. By sharing some of the unique characteristics of services, particularly their intangibility and perishability, the functions of servicescape are still presented virtually in cyberspace (Williams & Dargel, 2004). Thus, in technology-mediated interviews, employers are likely to be affected by different physical appearances of the job candidate, therefore perceive differently on their employment suitability.

The proposed research also focuses on the implicit personality theory to illustrate how employers may use external factors, such as backgrounds to judge job candidates' internal personalities and other attributes. This theory was first developed by Tagiuri and Bruner (1954), which means knowing that someone has a particular trait leads one to believe that they have other traits as well. The theory proposed that the biases an individual uses when forming impressions based on a limited amount of initial information about an unfamiliar person (Pedersen, 1965). One of the most remarkable features of implicit personality theories is that they are implicit. In this case, "implicit" means "automatic" (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). It is generally believed that most of the social perception process is actually automated. For example, a person may experience automatic thought processes, which occur without the person's intention or awareness. Therefore, interviewers may use external cues to make potential judgments on the interviewee's personality and hiring decisions.

A wide variety of studies have used implicit personality theory as a lens to examine workplace phenomena. For example, implicit personality theory was used as a mediator to study sexual harassment in the workplace, and the result showed that less attractive males rated as having more negative traits resulted in higher ratings of sexual harassment (Golden, Johnson & Lopez, 2001). The possible mechanism of the influence of attractiveness is discussed, and the results support the direct influence of stereotypes on the mediating role of implicit personality theory (Golden, Johnson & Lopez, 2001). Moreover, implicit personality theory plays a functional role in the employment interview. Attractive job candidates were found to fare better than unattractive job candidates in terms of a number of job-related outcomes (Hosoda, Stone-Romero & Coats, 2003). The impact of attractiveness is also found crucial in the assessment of employment suitability (Tews, Stafford & Zhu, 2009). Though attractiveness is examined as having less impact than general mental ability and conscientiousness, applicants' attractiveness may be as relevant for customer interaction positions (Tews, Stafford & Zhu, 2009).

Implicit personality theory may be useful for examining the impact of backgrounds/room types for a number of reasons. As noted above, interviewers may form initial impressions based on the limited external information such as the physical background to make judgments on interviewees' internal personalities and other attributes. The fundamental goal of this study is to examine the impact of different room types on the perception of employment suitability. In the context of implicit personality theory, because it is a salient contextual factor, room types may influence individuals' judgment of the occupant of the rooms.

Prior to hypothesizing, it is essential to delineate the functions and purposes of different room types in the present study. Goffman (1959) analyzed social interactions in terms of the

“performance” people give, that is, the communication of their social characteristics to others. According to Goffman, places of human interaction can usually be divided into “front regions”, such as the living room and dining room, where performances actually take place, and “back regions”, such as the bedroom and kitchen, where preparations for such “performances” are made.

As a “front region” space, the living room is a room mainly for relaxing and socializing in a residential house. In many modern households, the living room mainly functions as a reception room for guests and public activities. Also, the living room is suggested as central to the home experience and serves the purpose of communicating the dwellers’ image to guests and visitors (Rechavi, 2009). The kitchen is a room used for cooking and food preparation in a dwelling. In some houses, the kitchen may also be used as an area for dining purposes and function as a space for socializing with family and guests. Another room that is examined in the present study is the bedroom. A bedroom is usually characterized as a space for relaxing and sleeping. Individuals typically store their personal belongings and engage in private activities in the bedroom.

Among these three types of rooms, it is hypothesized that living rooms will be perceived better than kitchens and bedrooms. That is, living rooms are perceived more favorably than kitchens and bedrooms as they are the least personal. For example, the living room shows the interests and values of the owner of the room, as these spaces often display photos of family members and decorative crafts. At the same time, the furniture and decorations in the space also reflect the owner’s aesthetic taste, economic status, and even interpersonal situation. Physical environments play a significant role in facilitating and constraining individuals’ perceptions and

actions (Elsbach & Pratt, 2007). It is generally believed that people pay more attention to the living room area in the family unit, and this part of the space is the first thing visitors see, which determines the first impression of the guests on the owner of the house and the room as a whole. Findings also reveal that the living room may provide opportunities for intimacy between dwellers and their partners, as well as between dwellers and their guests (Rechavi, 2009).

In the context of an interview, interviewees should advocate professional images to the hiring managers. Living rooms are designated to be social spaces for individuals irrespective of their familiarity, and living rooms are likely more suitable for socializing with strangers. Influenced by Goffman (1959), Laumann and House (1970) explained that the living room is where communication of social characteristics takes place. Hence, it is the room where a connection between social identity and style is most likely revealed. In contrast, kitchens and bedrooms are primarily for family and personal uses. Since an employment interview typically involves socializing with strangers, the interviewees' environment should be appropriate for that context. Thus, interviewees in living rooms should be perceived most favorably.

Hypothesis 1: *Living rooms will be perceived more favorably than kitchens and bedrooms by employer in the context of a technology-mediated interview setting.*

The second issue to be examined in the present study is how the tidiness of the interviewee's room influences perceptions of employment suitability. Typically, tidiness relates to the state or quality of one's belongings that are arranged neatly and orderly (tidiness, n.d.). Although individuals may perceive their living environments as acceptable to themselves and their families, strangers may have different acceptability standards. In fact, tidiness is considered especially important when interviews occur in the home environment. Interviewees are able to

customize and manipulate their room settings to engage good impression formation for hiring managers, and potentially gain advantages in hiring decisions. Citing from John Wesley (1993), “cleanliness is indeed next to godliness”. It is difficult for individuals to grow up in our society without believing that we are judged by the tidiness of our homes to some extent.

This study argues that an organized and tidy physical environment attracts individuals naturally. In fact, perhaps tidiness may be one of the first things individuals notice when they enter a space. In interviews with residents in multi-family housing developments, Becker and Coniglio (1975) study found that the tidiness of residents’ home settings contributed to a large component of their life satisfaction. Study findings claimed that a tidy and clean home helped create a good impression on others and communicate a sense of respectability (Becker & Coniglio, 1975). There are also a variety of settings where individuals value and notice tidiness. For example, in hospitality settings, hotel tidiness and overall hygiene performance are critical reasons for consumers to revisit a hotel (Choi, 2019). Also, in a health care setting, tidiness is considered the most salient environmental feature associated with patient satisfaction (Harris, McBride, Ross, & Curtis, 2002).

The tidiness of settings, specifically in the workplace, can largely affect perceptions of management and communicate a sense of respectability. Previous research found that grooming standards and business dress attire expectations are important indicators of professionalism (Ruetzler, Taylor, Reynolds, Baker & Killen, 2012). It has been examined that physical attractiveness plays a vital role for candidates to be qualified for managerial roles coupled with scholastic record and work experience (Dipboye, Arvey & Terpstra, 1977). Additional research has shown that personal appearance and professional image are important characteristics

perceived by people in golf and other industries (Fjelstul, 2007). Even though hiring managers may not oppose an untidy interviewing space from the applicants, they may perceive candidates who posit themselves in such environments as unprofessional and unprepared for the interview process. Further, it can be inferred that the preparedness of the room setting indicates the seriousness of the event.

Hiring managers likely view candidates in a tidy environment as high-performing employees by inferring individuals who clean up their interview space as conscientious and largely concerned with their own success at work. One of the “Big Five” personality factors is conscientiousness which is generally believed to be necessary for the prediction of job performance (Dudley et al., 2006). Conscientiousness is a fundamental personality trait that reflects the quality of being diligent, responsible, hardworking, and organized (Roberts et al., 2009). Tidiness is a significant factor that is related to both orderliness and reliability and has been identified as a behavior that conscientious individuals tend to perform (Jackson et al., 2010). Employees also believed that having a clean and tidy working environment tends to be perceived as ethical, and as such, they are more willing to display citizenship behaviors (Zhong, DeCelles, & House, 2015). The influence of these factors leads to the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: *Tidy rooms are perceived more favorably than untidy rooms by employers in the context of a technology-mediated interview.*

Chapter 4

Methodology

The sample for this study was 309 corporate management personnel from different organizations and companies. On Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), we set the participants' occupations to management positions only. All of them had previous work experience in corporate recruitment and talent acquisition. Of the 309 individuals who chose to participate, 54% were female, and 77% were Caucasian. Their average age was 36.52 (SD= 12.08), and their average length of employment was 5.90 years (SD= 4.31). All participants were employed in management or executive positions. They had to have relevant experience in training, management, and participation in employee performance reviews as well as previous experience in employee interviewing. These individuals were employed in a variety of industries, with 50.2% from the manufacturing industry, 16.5% from the financial services, and the remainder from other industries. Through an online survey, the participants read a scenario depicting a hypothetical job candidate who is being interviewed virtually, and then rated the candidate's employment suitability. The virtual interview was evaluated in the early stages of the selection process.

The candidate profiles were created for an individual named "Sam Li" in their early twenties who are depicted as applying for an entry-level management position. Overall, Sam answered the interview questions impressively, and the answers were detailed and well thought out. In addition, Sam provided many relevant examples of why they would be a good fit for the company. However, one concern was that Sam might become a job hopper, as Sam revealed a desire "not to be tied to any position or company for more than three years." This concern led the

hiring managers to interview three other candidates. Once they have conducted these interviews, they will invite two of them onsite for another round of interviews.

In a $2 \times 3 \times 2$ experimental design, 12 different technology-mediated interview settings were created. By using a between-subject design, participants were randomly assigned to observe one of 12 interview settings. In each scenario, the candidate was either male or female; in a living room, kitchen, or bedroom; which was tidy or not. Participants were randomly assigned to 1 of the 12 different photographs with approximately 25 participants evaluating each.

After reading the candidate profiles, the participants evaluated the candidate's employment suitability by providing an assessment of person-organization fit. Higgins and Judge's (2004) two-item scale was used to measure person-organization fit. Example items include: *This candidate would be a great match for my company and its employees* and *This employee values perfectly align with the values of my company*. These questions were answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The internal consistency reliability estimate for the person-organization fit was .63.

The participants also assess the perception of competence of the job candidates using a five-item, 5-point scale ranging from (1) not at all to (5) completely based on Fiske and colleagues (2002). Items in this scale include *To what extent do each of the following descriptions characterize the candidate..., as competent, confident, independent, competitive, and intelligent*. The internal consistency reliability estimate for competence was .71.

Chapter 5

Results

Table 1 and Table 2 provide the Tests of Between-Subjects to compare the effect of room type and room tidiness on person-organization fit and the perception of competence.

Hypothesis 1, which proposed that living rooms are perceived more favorably than kitchens and bedrooms, was not supported. There was not a statistically significant effect of room type on person-organization fit ($F [2, 303] = .212, p = .809$) and the perception of competence ($F [1, 303] = .181, p = .671$).

Hypothesis 2, which proposed that tidy rooms are perceived more favorably than untidy rooms, was not supported. There was not a statistically significant effect of tidiness on person-organization fit ($F [2, 303] = .438, p = .646$) and the perception of competence ($F [1, 303] = .112, p = .738$).

The interaction between room type and tidiness was non-significant for both tested outcomes: person-organization fit ($F [2, 303] = .784, p = .457$) and the perception of competence ($F [2, 303] = 1.633, p = .197$).

Table 1
Results of ANOVA Analysis for Person-Organization Fit

Source	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	p	R ²
Model	5	.909	.182	.424	.832	.007
Error	303	129.957	.429			
Corrected Total	308	130.865				
Independent Variables						
Room Type	2	.182	.091	.212	.809	
Tidiness	1	.078	.078	.181	.671	
Rm. Type × Tidiness	2	.673	.336	.784	.457	

Table 2
Results of ANOVA Analysis for Competence

Source	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	p	R ²
Model	5	1.620	.324	.838	.523	.014
Error	303	117.126	.387			
Corrected Total	308	118.747				
Independent Variables						
Room Type	2	.339	.169	.438	.646	
Tidiness	1	.043	.043	.112	.738	
Rm. Type × Tidiness	2	1.262	.631	1.633	.197	

Post Hoc Result

Table 3 provides the post hoc analysis using Tests of Between-Subjects to compare the effect of room type and gender on the perception of competence. The post hoc result indicated that the interaction between room type and gender was significant: perception of competence (F

[2, 297] = 3.266, $p = .04$). In addition, there was significant interaction between tidiness and gender: perception of competence ($F [2, 297] = 4.228, p = .041$).

Table 3
Results of ANOVA Analysis for Competence

Source	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	p	R ²
Model	11	7.051	.641	1.704	.072	.059
Error	297	111.696	.376			
Corrected Total	308	118.747				
Independent Variables						
Room Type	2	.358	.179	.476	.621	
Gender	1	.754	.754	2.005	.158	
Rm. Type × Gender	2	2.457	1.228	3.266	.040	
Tidiness	1	.037	.037	.097	.755	
Tidiness × Gender	1	1.590	1.590	4.228	.041	
Tidiness × Room Type	2	1.257	.629	1.671	.190	
Tidiness × Gender × Rm. Type	2	.534	.267	.710	.493	

The interaction between gender and room tidiness is presented graphically in Figure 1. Under a tidy room condition, male candidates are evaluated greatly more positive than female candidates. When it comes to an untidy room condition, female candidates are perceived more favorably than male candidates. As with the interaction between gender and room types, Figure 2 shows that both genders are perceived similar in bedrooms and living rooms. However, in a kitchen setting, male candidates are weighted more favorably than female candidates.

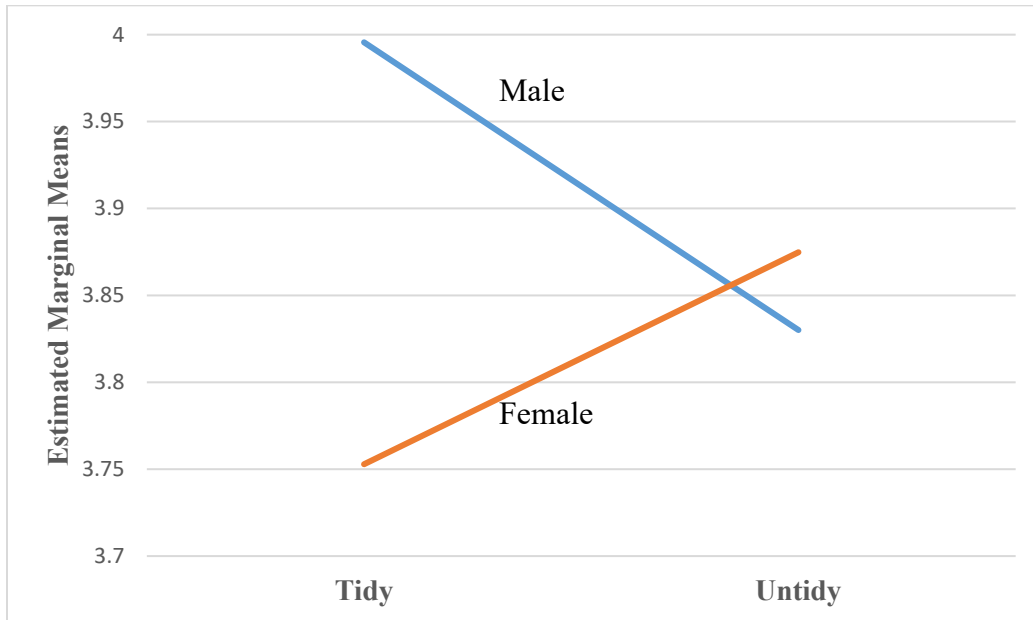


Figure 1. The interaction between gender and room tidiness on the perception of competence.

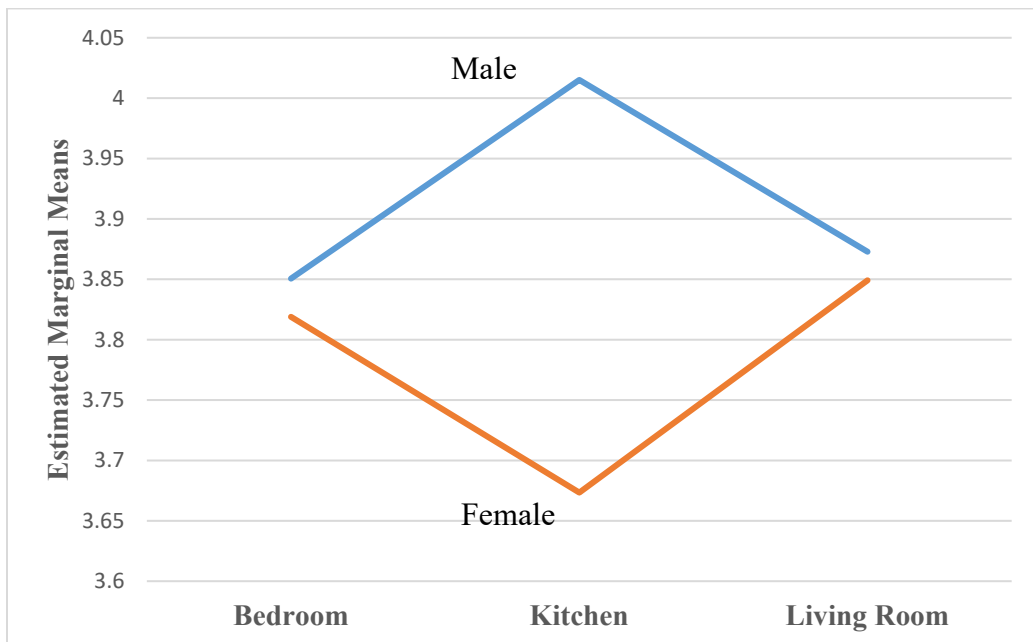


Figure 2. The interaction between gender and room types on the perception of competence.

Chapter 6

Discussion

The present study contributes to the larger body of research on employee selection in technology-mediated interviews with its primary focus on the impact of physical backgrounds on the perception of employment suitability. Given the uniqueness of technology-mediated interviews, the context generated by the different physical environments from distinct candidates may become salient and influence hiring managers' attention. By examining the impact of room types and tidiness conditions of rooms on the perception of employment suitability, this research provides insight into the employment selection decisions and the potential impact of physical backgrounds in technology-mediated interviews.

Overall, the results of this study suggested that concerns about the contextual factors related to room types and room tidiness in the virtual interview did not significantly affect the interview outcome. This may be a hint that the widespread use of technology-based interviews in employee selection has allowed both interviewers and interviewees to adapt to this mode of interviewing. Particularly, in the post-pandemic period, technology-mediated interviews have facilitated safe social distance and offered time and financial convenience for both hiring parties. By conducting interviews in distinct physical environments, both interviewing parties are able to observe each other's living environment and personal space. Over time, this has contributed to an increased awareness of how interviewers treat different interviewing backgrounds to reduce direct personal bias against the background itself. This section will discuss the implications of

the post-hoc findings and current research results, as well as the various limitations affecting the findings and potential future research directions for the study.

Although none of the hypotheses are supported, the post-hoc analysis provides essential evidence that implies hiring managers place different weights on job candidates of different genders. There are significant interactions between gender and room tidiness and room types regarding perceived competence. The first evidence supports the notion that participants hold differentially requirements for how tidy men and women are. Specifically, women with tidy rooms are judged as less competent than men with the same condition. However, in relatively untidy settings, women are perceived as more competent than male candidates. It is worth noting that when a relatively tidy room was assessed, female candidates were held to higher standards of tidiness. This finding may be closely related to the traditional gender stereotypes today in that female suffers more negative social consequences and moral criticism when they fail to meet expected tidiness standards (The'baud, Kornrich & Ruppner, 2021). Female occupants are generally deemed to be the members responsible for household chores, and this traditional perception of gender-imposed roles leaves women out of favor in even relatively tidy environments. On the other hand, limited gender effects are found in evaluations of an untidy room, and male candidates are even disadvantaged compared to female candidates. This finding to some extent overturns the traditional stereotype that "tidy" and "orderly" are the gender roles that women are stereotypically assigned. In fact, the findings suggest that when women are placed in relatively untidy environments, a counter stereotypical picture is formed. The relative disorder and untidiness that women introduced into their environment helps them to appear masculine and can be perceived as more competent than male candidates by hiring managers.

The second evidence focused on the fact that the perceptual competence of male and female candidates differed by room types. This study examined three common room types in the home setting: bedroom, kitchen, and living room. The findings showed that in the bedroom and living room, male and female candidates were assessed similarly in terms of perceived competence. However, in the kitchen environment, female candidates were perceived to be at a disadvantage compared to males. This finding is interesting because the kitchen has considered an extremely feminine space that coincides with female stereotypes reference (de Lemus et al., 2014). Women have been recognized as the primary bearers of domestic housekeeping and cooking tasks in a household. Due to gender stereotypes are deeply ingrained in our society, and people evaluate candidates' competencies based on a range of gender characteristics (e.g., personal traits, role behaviors, occupations) (Elizabeth et al., 2016). So at least in this study, when female candidates were closely associated with the kitchen, their competence was negatively evaluated. In contrast, participants favor male candidates who were interviewed in a kitchen setting, and while this goes against the traditional image of masculinity, it is because gender stereotypes give men a greater advantage when it comes to competence evaluations (Eagly et al., 2000 & Fiske et al., 2007).

The present study offers practical implications for both hiring managers conducting technology-mediated interviews and prospective job applicants. From the applicant perspective, the clear implication is that individuals should be aware of the interview environment they are in and the tidiness of the environment when conducting virtual interviews. Although in the case of virtual interviews, interviewees have the right to choose the physical environment in which they attend the interview, they should still be cognizant of the attitudes of their potential future employers. Female interviewees, in particular, should display certain levels of untidiness and

disorganization to gain the favor of perceived competence from hiring managers. This approach provides female candidates with a more masculine style despite it is resulted from gender stereotypes. From the employer perspective, hiring managers should understand how to interpret the interviewees' backgrounds to make selection decisions. Virtual interview context is fraught with a large number of private features, hiring managers should be trained on how to avoid bias based on candidates' interview backgrounds. Organizations should conduct structured interviews and assign a standardized rating system to make the evaluation process more objective.

This study creates photographs that include various interview background contexts paired with different levels of tidiness, which also presents a potential limitation. The participants did not engage in actual interaction with the job applicant by asking interview questions. The lack of live interaction may affect the participants' focus and influence their decision to hire. Future research might examine virtual interview backgrounds by utilizing live interactions and use eye trackers to record reactions from hiring managers. It is likely that individuals may react differently and shift their visual attention in a video context. A second limitation is that the participants evaluated hypothetical candidate profiles. This leaves this study with an issue of external validity. Technically speaking, the results of the study can only be generalized to that part of the sample as a whole but not all job candidates who employ technology-mediated interviews. Additional research could potentially conduct content analysis based on applicant profiles and interview backgrounds of actual job seekers to study their relation to actual job search outcomes. The third limitation of this study is that only subjects of Asian ethnicity were included. This may potentially interfere with the judgment of hiring managers. Future studies should consider testing subjects from different ethnic groups to obtain more representative and precise results.

Without question, physical backgrounds in technology-mediated interviews offer hiring managers the opportunity to view candidates from a different vantage point. Physical backgrounds are relevant because they potentially reveal the candidates' personality that may affect the hiring outcomes. The primary concentration of this study is on the potential effects of room types and room tidiness on the perceptions of employment suitability. The post hoc results highlight that gender interactions could factor into hiring managers' perceptions of candidates' employment suitability in a meaningful way. As technology-mediated interviews will continue to be a popular media for employment selection, this research is valuable for organizations to utilize background content to evaluate job candidates. It is hoped that the results of the present study can provide some insights into contextual factors for hiring managers to implement their decisions and offer guidance for prospective job candidates in technology-mediated interviews.

Appendix A

Scenario

At the beginning of the interview, Samantha introduces herself, thanks you in advance for your time, and asks if you need for her to send you a copy of her resume. You then proceed to ask Samantha a series of questions regarding her academics, extracurricular activities, and previous experience.

Overall, Samantha answered your questions impressively. Her answers were detailed and well thought out. In addition, she provided many relevant examples. Moreover, she made a compelling case as to why she would be a good fit.

However, one concern is that Samantha may be a job hopper. Samantha expressed a desire not to be tied to any position or company for more than three years.

At the end of the interview, you ask Samantha if she has any questions. She asks what other employees like best about their work and asks about a recent news article regarding your organization.

The next day, you receive an email from Samantha thanking you for your time. As an added touch, she sends a handwritten thank-you note which you receive three days later. These thank-you notes were a nice touch, but Samantha misspelled your name in the handwritten note.

Within the next week, you plan to interview three other candidates. Once you have conducted these interviews, you will invite two individuals onsite for another round of interviews.

Appendix B

Potential Photographs

Samantha Li



Figure 3. Female in a tidy bedroom

Sam Li



Figure 4. Male in an untidy bedroom

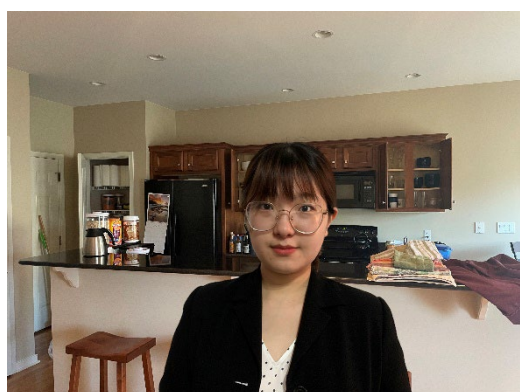


Figure 5. Female in an untidy kitchen



Figure 6. Male in a tidy kitchen



Figure 7. Female in a tidy living room



Figure 8. Male in an untidy living room

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Baolu Wang

EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University, Schreyer Honors College State College, PA

B.S. in Hospitality Management 09/2017 – 05/2022

B.S. in Labor and Human Resources 09/2020 – 05/2022

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Sea Crest Beach Hotel North Falmouth, MA

Intern, Guest Room Department 05/2019 – 08/2019

Responsibility:

- Received the training of room cleaning and checking the cleaning result;
- Managed the cleaning preparation work of approximately 50 rooms for 20 guests on a daily basis

Achievement:

- Understood the guest room operation of seaside resort hotels;
- Harvested a primary understanding of the hotel industry development by sitting in on hotel executives meetings

Penn State University Campus Dining State College, PA

Rotational Intern 01/2019 – 12/2019

Responsibility:

- Took internships of all positions with working twenty hours per week on average;
- Got promoted as the student manager after having finished the training of all positions;
- Supervised food quality and safety as well as service quality as the manager

Achievement:

- Accumulated real-world experience in the catering industry and obtained the internship certificate

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

The Effects of Physical Backgrounds in Technology-Mediated Interviews on Perceptions of Employment Suitability

Author

- The focus of this study is to determine the impact of physical backgrounds in technology-mediated interviews on the perceptions of employment suitability.

LEADERSHIP AND EXTRACURRICULAR EXPERIENCE

Pop-up Fast Food Interaction

Planner and Operator

10/2019

- Planned a pop-up fast food interaction activity while practicing in the campus dining;

- Took charge of all preparations, including purchasing food and decorations, preparing food since 6 a.m., and receiving guests for about four hours;
- Raised the idea of publicizing our activity on the website of Food Management

New Students Orientation

Orientation Leader

08/2018

- Helped first-year students familiarize themselves with the campus life