Bias During Cyber-Vetting Using Social Media and Online Searches

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Abstract

Many businesses consistently claim to support the importance of employee diversity within their organizations. However, hiring processes do not always reflect or support the diversity that is sought or promised. This research addressed gaps in the literature regarding the biases that are triggered and formed when social media profiles, including text and images, of job candidates are viewed during social media and online searches as part of the hiring or cyber-vetting process. The researcher conducted interviews with 15 hiring professionals to get a better understanding of the processes used by human resource professionals when cyber-vetting candidates using SMOS, as well as the unique challenges that minorities may face in the job market because of how human resource professionals use social media during hiring. This study examined the degree to which hiring professionals consider candidates' social media profiles during a cyber-vetting process (before interviewing or hiring the candidate), how the information is used or considered, and awareness of biases triggered by pictures and content during SMOS. The study's finding suggests that the use of SMOS by hiring professionals, typically during informal SMOS, can initiate biases against some minority candidates causing rejection based on images or text discovered, or assumptions made, during the cyber-vetting process.

Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 10

Background 11
Statement of the Problem 15
Personnel Selection and Reference Checks 15
Social Media Searches and Hiring 17
Legal Matters 19
Biases 24
Purpose of the Study 26
Research Question 26
Significance of the Study 26
Definitions 27
Overview of Chapters 27

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 29

Hiring Patterns 29
Recruitment Process 29
External Staffing Supply Chain 30
Reference Checks and Predictability 31
Cyber-vetting 32
Discrimination, Stereotyping, Bias, and Colorism 34
Discrimination 34
Stereotyping 35
Bias 39
Colorism 41
Social Media 43
Facebook 45
LinkedIn 45
Twitter 46
YouTube 46
Research on Social Media, Recruitment, and Selection 47

Privacy....48
Due Diligence and Cyber-Vetting....50
Theories....51
Implicit Bias Theory....51
Uncertainty Reduction Theory....56
Attraction Selection Attrition Theory....57
Theory of Reasoned Action....58
Attribution Theory....60
Summary....61

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY....62

Purpose of the Study....62
Research Question....63
Research Design....63
Population and Sample....64
Field Testing....65
Data Collection....66
Instrumentation....67
Data Analysis....67
Research Quality....69
Summary....70

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS....72

Purpose of the Study....72
Research Question....72
Methodology Summary....72
Participants....73
Findings....75
Participants Understanding of Cyber-vetting....76
Categories....77
Social Media Use....79
LinkedIn....81

Facebook. 82
Other sites used. 82
Criteria Being Examined Using Social Media 83
Social Media Red Flags 87
Biases Elicited by SM Use 91
Awareness and Management of Biases 92
Observable Characteristics on Social Media 95
Outside Influences on Decision Making 98
Findings: Themes 99
Other Themes 105
Conclusion 106

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION 107

Purpose Statement 107
Research Question 107
Summary of Methodology 108
Major Themes 109
Techniques for Using Social Media in Cyber-Vetting 112
Theme 1: Images Observed on Social Media 112
Theme 2: Relying on Intuition or Subjectivity When Cyber-vetting 113
Theme 3: Influence from Outside Sources 115
Theme 4: Informal Use of SMOS as a Vetting Tool 116
Practical Implications 117
Opportunities for Further Research 120
Limitations 121
Conclusion 122

REFERENCES 125

Appendices

Appendix A - Interview Protocol.....142

Appendix B – Introduction Email.....145

Appendix C - Study Consent Letter.....146

Appendix D – IRB Approval.....149

List of Tables

Table 1 Participant Demographics 73

Table 2 Code Categories and Frequencies 78

Table 3 Findings and Themes 111

List of Figures

Figure 1. Social Media Use 2015-2018 12

Figure 2. Blacks and Whites' Experiences Contrasted 21

Figure 3. External Staffing Supply Chain 30

Figure 4. Theory of Reasoned Action 59

Figure 5. Data Analysis Process 68

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Social media and online searches (SMOS) play a significant role during the hiring process; perhaps more than a job candidate may consider. The ability to utilize SMOS such as search engines, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, or other applications, gives an employer insight into a potential employee as portrayed on the public Internet (Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Curran, Draus, Schrager, & Zappala, 2014; Forster, 2006). Once an employer cyber-vets (searches for and finds information on the candidate) through a SMOS, conscious or unconscious biases such as race or gender may be applied.

Cyber-vetting has become an opportunity for companies to investigate the personal lifestyle and background of the prospective candidate, without having to talk to the candidate, prior employers, or personal references. The emergence of sites like Facebook has given its users an extension of their identity, the ability to present a profile and create a sense of belonging to a group or groups (Smith & Kidder, 2010). The willingness to post what one thinks on social media (SM) is popular and opens the door to not only family and friends but also hiring professionals viewing personal information. Hiring professionals such as recruiters, human resource managers, hiring managers, search committee members, and others involved in hiring processes and decisions can use SMOS and the Internet to access information on would-be hires.

The cyber-vetting process, including viewing posted images or written content, can initiate explicit or implicit biases towards the candidate during the screening of résumés, before offering a position, or even giving an applicant an interview.

Implicit bias and unconscious bias are two umbrella terms used to define subconscious biases based on race, gender, age, status, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status (Jones, 2016). Implicit bias was initially defined by Greenwald and Banaji (1995) as implicit attitudes

that “are introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of experience that mediate favorable or unfavorable feeling, thought, or action toward social objects" (p. 8). Recruitment and selection processes may be impacted by either implicit bias or even bias that the hiring professional is conscious of (explicit bias), but may not openly acknowledge. Having a bias can keep an employer from making a job offer based on skin color, a black sounding name, or some other superficial aspect of observable identity (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003; Williams, 2017). In the workplace, when it comes to vetting as well as hiring, explicit and implicit bias keeps the pool of *qualified* minority candidate hires to a lower number than other groups. According to Williams (2017), biases are real, and can closely “resemble traditional prejudice and racial animus, while others are subtle, unconscious, and institutionally based” (p. 1476).

This study aims to understand the hiring professionals’ use of SMOS in cyber-vetting, the biases that may arise during the process, and how and when biases might occur. This study also seeks to identify how SMOS might be used in a biased or implicitly biased way to the disadvantage of minorities in the United States.

Background

Pew Research Center noted that in November 2016, 69% of the public used at least one SM platform, growing from just 50% in 2011 and 5% in 2005, when SM users began to be tracked. In three short years, the number of SM users worldwide has grown to almost 3 billion users over eight major networking sites (Smith & Anderson, 2018).

Figure 1 represents a PEW research study performed in January 2018, that shows the percentage of US adults that use SM sites either online or through their cell phones. YouTube, a video-sharing platform, has emerged as the most visited medium with 73% of users; however, was not a factor for this study.

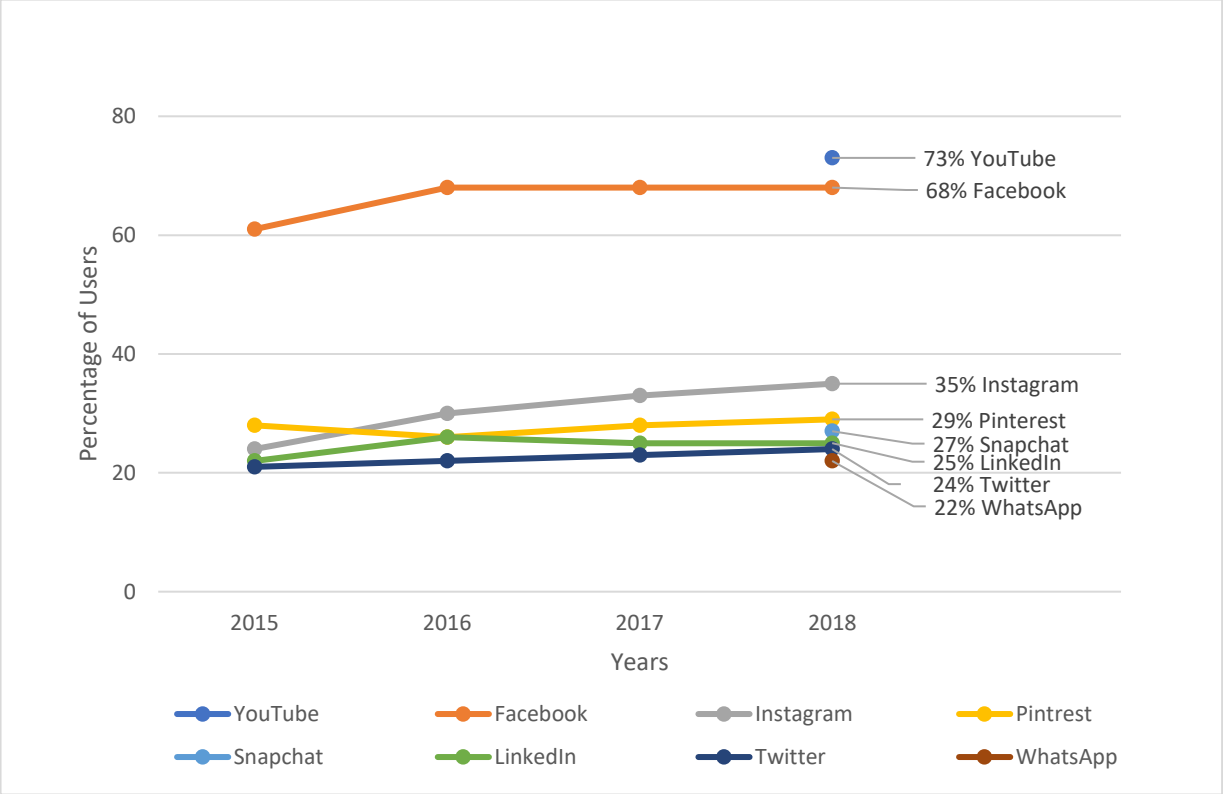

Figure 1. Social media use 2015-2018 (Adapted from PEW Research Center, 2019)

In the United States, 77% of those SM users owned a social networking profile which is a 3% decrease from 2017 (Statista, 2019). SM sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, and Twitter, have become vessels to share personal experiences of the user. This information, when posted online, becomes open source information when privacy settings are not used. While there is an awareness and concern with privacy on SM, many users still engage in posting images and messages about events and experiences that employers may find appealing to the organization (e.g., charity work) or that could hurt the organization's reputation (e.g., illegal or morally

questionable activity). According to Smith and Anderson (2018), Facebook's usage statistics have remained unchanged at 68% of Americans having a profile on Facebook, with a frequency of daily use at 74% (2016-2018); this shows a substantial difference of SM use when compared to other platforms including LinkedIn, Snapchat, and Instagram. While Facebook is most popular amongst all users, LinkedIn, touted as a professional business site, was 50% more popular amongst college students and individuals in high-income families than individuals with either only a high school diploma or GED (Smith & Anderson, 2018). This site allows members to make connections by actively posting images, stories, professional updates, résumés, and personal data, as well as letting candidates search for company information and jobs through the same platform (Statista, 2017).

According to research by CareerBuilder (2016), "The number of employers using social media to screen candidates has increased 500 percent over the last decade" (para. 1). The study consisted of over 5,000 hiring managers and private sector employers and exclaimed, "Six in ten employers who currently use social networking sites to research job candidates (60 percent) are "looking for information that supports their qualifications for the job," 53% of these hiring managers want to see if the candidate has a professional online persona, 30% want to see what other people are posting about the candidate, and 21% admit they're looking for reasons not to hire the candidate" (para 5). The article continues that in 2016, 49% of employers that used SM as a vetting tool found information that caused them not to offer employment. An updated survey completed by CareerBuilder found the number of employers that used SM to screen applicants rose to 70% (Driver, 2018). While cyber-vetting is not the only means of performing background checks on would-be hires. However, for the companies that do use the Internet as a cyber-vetting source, these numbers will only grow as the use of searches of Facebook,

LinkedIn, email correspondence, and other online social applications become popular with both individuals seeking employment, as well as the employers researching prospective hires to view what they have posted on the Internet.

In a 5-year study from 2010 to 2015 on privacy and Facebook usage among college students, Tsay-Vogel, Shanahan, and Signorielli (2018) focused their study on self-disclosure (what a person chooses to share) and the “association between attitudes and behaviors” (p. 4). The research found that from 2010 to 2012, students that had limited use on Facebook were more likely to have higher privacy controls set while heavy users were more relaxed in the use of privacy controls for their pages. As the goal of the user is to share personal lived history, the research also found that due to lack of face-to-face interaction, users were more likely to provide more robust self-disclosure through posts to connect with their followers, and less likely to use privacy controls to protect who sees the material.

LinkedIn is the SM site most explicitly intended for professional networking and job seeking. There are privacy settings, but they may be seldom used because the goal of LinkedIn is to have organizations “look” at an individual’s profile and achievements as they are a cyber-résumé. However, LinkedIn falls behind other SM sites that employers might consider when searching for non-professional candidate information. By having such an abundant source of information readily available for almost anyone to see, implicit biases can "produce behavior that diverges from a person's avowed or endorsed beliefs or principles" (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006, p. 951). Just the same, those with conscious biases have further information to exercise their biases, often without direct accountability to candidates or anti-discrimination laws and statutes. Bennett-Alexander and Hartman (2015) state that in most cases, an employee will not be alerted to biases applied to them during hiring processes unless the reason for rejecting their application

is shared with the applicant, which many companies intentionally avoid. As technology continues to evolve rapidly, and more of the population are Internet and SM users, the path to employment no longer relies upon a résumé, a call, and a face-to-face interview. SMOS have become an essential source for many businesses to vet candidates as part of background screening processes. Moreover, the process of cyber-vetting introduces a new spectrum of information regarding a candidate's personal images or video, written words, or behaviors to employers allowing for a potential in-depth or privacy-invading examination of a candidates' history.

Statement of the Problem

This study focuses on the use of SMOS by hiring professionals during hiring processes and how biases may be activated against minority candidates during this process.

Personnel Selection and Reference Checks

Validation of a candidate's application information has maintained the same purpose during previous decades - to verify information provided by a candidate through information provided by a previous employer (Delarosa, 2014; Paetzold & Willborn, 1992) and to help predict the success of a candidate (Muchinsky, 1979). However, the process has drastically changed over the past 40 years. Recruitment prior to the 1980s had usually relied on the references by past employers, either by an informal phone call, or more popular, a letter of approval or reference (Anderson, 1986; Cooper, 1997). While reference checks were thought to be of little value during the 90s, receiving a letter of recommendation was popular and could provide the potential employee a slight edge over other candidates. However, by 1997, the "No Comment" movement (giving limited information such as employment dates), quickly became employed by organizations to protect from being sued by employees for providing (negative)

references (Cooper, 1997), leaving companies to make hiring decisions based solely on the employee interview.

With the expansion of technology and SM sites, employers have the ability and opportunity, with little risk of being sued, to search candidate profiles on multiple online sites. This type of capability during the vetting stage may cause candidates to become, "particularly vulnerable to social categorization and biased decision-making, which is explained by the way recruiters (or observers more in general) process information during this stage" (Derous, Pepermans, & Ryan, 2017, p. 861). More than ever, the use of SMOS may be used to speed this process and result in answers that either help or hurt the candidate.

Cyber-vetting is considered an extension of conventional employment history checks for potential employees (Berkelaar, 2017). Used as a technologically savvy way of screening candidates, cyber-vetting is the process by which employers acquire information about candidates by using online sources to research and make hiring decisions that will allow the employer the opportunity to see if the candidate measures up to the image of the organization. (Berkelaar, 2010, 2014). As the use of SMOS has increased over the past few years, Grasz (2016) found that 41% of employers say that if they cannot find any information through an online search of a prospective hire, they are less likely to interview the candidate. Thirty-two percent of employers found information that helped them to decide to hire the candidate; 49% indicated that they found information on candidates that led them not to make an offer. Grasz's research suggests that shaping one's SM profile potentially benefits some candidates. This information may be related to past work experience, or even everyday life, as it gives employers a look into the day-to-day life of the prospective employee.

Despite potential biases, "There may be a legitimate business reason for looking at social networking sites to discover information about a potential employee that goes beyond the traditional résumé" (Reinsch, Ross, & Hietapelto, 2016, p. 154). Some reasons may include qualifying an individual due to previous work experiences or references that may be posted on a site such as LinkedIn. However, these sites can also be used to confirm a deeper-seated bias that comes to the surface because of images, video, or text depicting or suggesting drug use, illegal behavior, association with undesirable groups, or other behaviors and values that suggest an incompatibility between the employer and candidate.

Images, video, or wording seen on such sites may cause an employer to be influenced in a matter of moments, without them even realizing they are applying a discriminatory attitude (Valentino-Devies, 2013), or may be consciously and intentionally applied. Studies show that "old-fashioned racism is dying" (Brief, Dietz, Cohen, Pugh, & Vaslow, 2000, p. 74); however, "research on race and employment evaluations has often focused exclusively on stigmatized status, showing, for example, a bias toward positively stereotyped White applicants compared with Black applicants" (Rattan, Steele, & Ambady, 2019, p. 81). The struggle for minorities to compete for adequate employment continues, even after the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The need to increase diversity in many organizations still exists (Brown, Kijakazi, Runes, & Turner, 2019; Duehr & Bono, 2006; Melaku, 2019).

Social Media Searches and Hiring

During SMOS, information that is sometimes transferred from the candidate to employer is not always in the best interest of the would-be hire. The use of online "information may lead to discrimination against applicants, given the wide range of available personal information such

as gender, race, age, religion, and disability status otherwise illegal to use when making employment decisions" (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009, pp. 567-568).

In Acquisti and Fong's (2015) study, they found that although "discrimination via online searches of candidates may not yet be widespread, online disclosures of personal traits can significantly influence the hiring decisions of a selected set of employers" (p. 4). While Acquisti and Fong studied race, gender, and sexual orientation of applicants and what they post, the present study will attempt to fill the gap in the literature by focusing on minorities including people of color, women, and those with disabilities.

Issues such as discrimination when hiring minorities is hard to study due to the hiring professional not being completely aware that a specific bias may have been applied to discredit the candidate. Moreover, many employers may leave little evidence of having been biased by SM or other information about a characteristic (e.g., being Black, female, of a certain age, or having a disability) by burying the evidence through claims of hiring the most qualified candidate, even when race or minority membership played into the decision-making process. In large pools of candidates, individuals may not be deeply screened, and superficial characteristics (such as color) could play a large role in attracting managers to certain candidates within the pool of similarly qualified candidates (Hunter, 2007; Maddox & Gray, 2002; Rattan et al., 2019). In cases such as this, workplace discrimination based on skin tone at times may be an everyday occurrence that is not representative solely of minority status or individual beliefs of the hiring professional. That is, discrimination is not always based on the race of the individual, other factors may be used (e.g., gender, disability) to determine if a candidate will be hired.

Trentham and Larwood (1998) found that "Individuals who do not themselves hold negative prejudices may nonetheless 'rationally' choose to discriminate as a consequence of

particular attributional and instrumental conditions" (p. 2). Thus, meaning that the hiring professional may choose to pass on hiring an applicant based on race or gender because of a bias-related culture that exists (and is accepted) within the organization due to the beliefs of top-level management or owners.

Legal Matters

Using SMOS as either a formal or informal vetting tool may pose legal challenges for organizations as it allows the hiring professional access to images, video, names, and an opportunity to see potentially private moments that would not be possible without the use of the Internet. If a candidate discovers that SMOS information was used in a discriminatory way during the selection process, they may have grounds to challenge the organization and lay discrimination charges. In an attempt to level the hiring field between minorities and Whites, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed into law. Wilson (1978), found that while the Civil Rights Movement created opportunities for minorities, by the same token, it limited Blacks to a lesser economic class in the labor market. Affirmative action introduced in Title VII prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin (*Civil Rights Act of 1964 § 7, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e et seq*, 1964). According to the *U. S. Government Manual of 1998-99*, an expansion of the role of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) includes:

> The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission enforces laws which prohibit discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, or age in hiring, promoting, firing, setting wages, testing, training, apprenticeship, and all other terms and conditions of employment. (*The U.S. Government Manual*, 1998-1999, p. 517)

The EEOC's guidance and enforcement is a staple in safeguarding hiring practices in the US. However, companies have found ways to work around this outdated law, as may occur if bias is subtlety applied through SMOS during the screening process, such as when hiring

managers do their own informal search which is not documented, it may not be discovered by candidates and not reported to the EEOC. In 2017, there were 28,528 claims made with monetary awards to victims reaching $75.9m (EEOC, 2017). While the number of claims has decreased by an average of 4,000 since 2007, there is still room for improvement.

The Civil Rights Movement was meant to help minorities in the area of finding equal employment opportunities. However, Braddock and McPartland (1987) found that,

> Barriers can appear at the job candidate stage when employers are recruiting the pool of candidates for job openings, at the job entry stage when an individual is actually selected to fill the vacancy, and at the job promotion stage when transfers are made within a firm to fill spots at higher-levels. (p. 3)

Such barriers are not always explicit, acknowledged, or even discoverable as they exist as part of implicit biases exercised by recruiters who may not acknowledge that SMOS or online information influenced hiring choices.

Even though laws and initiatives are set in place to limit workplace and hiring inequity, discrimination still exists. According to Patten (2016), even though cases of earning inequality have decreased over the years, “In 2015, Blacks earned 75% as much as Whites in median hourly earnings and women earned 83% as much as men” (para. 1). As shown in Figure 2, Patton (2016) addresses this disparity by stating, “Two-in-ten Black adults (21%) and 16% of Hispanics say that in the past year they have been treated unfairly in hiring, pay or promotion because of their race or ethnicity; just 4% of White adults say the same” (para. 14) .

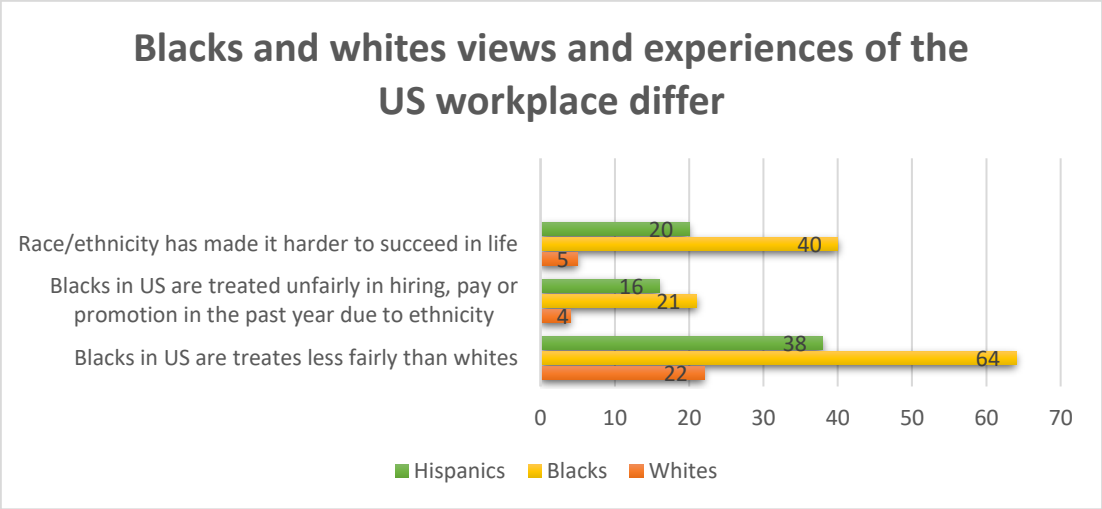

Figure 2. Blacks and whites' experiences contrasted (adapted from PEW Research Center, 2016)

There is a significant gap in the racial inequality literature with regards to why whites are hired over most persons of color. Colorism, the discrimination against people based on the level of the color of their skin, plays a crucial role in the thought process of hiring professionals' approaches to minorities (Hunter, 2007). While there is research that seeks to understand how and why discrimination exists, it sometimes falls short or becomes outdated almost as soon as the material has been printed. Fairlie (1999) states that "as measured by levels of unemployment, Blacks were as far behind in 1979 as they were in 1959" (p. 198), leading to the belief that the more things change, the more they remain the same.

Research completed by Hunter (2007) suggests that colorism is not just a Black problem, as it also is inclusive of Latinos and Asians alike. In the two dimensions of race and color included in her study, Hunter found that "The intensity of discrimination, the frequency, and the outcomes of that discrimination will differ dramatically by skin tone" (p. 238). This suggests that racism may be the bigger picture while colorism has become a manifestation of discrimination. This theory suggests that colorism is linked to opportunity largely because people are innately

unaware of their preference for lighter skin tones over darker ones (Hunter, 2007; Maddox & Gray, 2002). Additionally, Hunter notes that "Given the opportunity, many people will hire a light-skinned person before a dark-skinned person of the same race" (p. 238).

Data from the Displaced Worker Survey (DWS) conducted between 1984–1992, found that Black men were 30 percent more likely to experience job loss, and were 30 percent less likely to find gainful employment than Caucasian men (Fairlie & Kletzer, 1998). Thus showing that while some of the disparity may be due to education and relevant job choice, factors such as race may be a significant factor in this unexplained gap of discrimination in the workplace (Fryer, Pager, & Spenkuch, 2013). It is hard to deny that stereotyping and biases play a role in these numbers. Before the Civil Rights Act, gender typing was just as prevalent as racism (Darity Jr & Mason, 2004). The importance of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was not just a step up for Blacks; it also helped to reduce discrimination against women (*Civil Rights Act of 1964 § 7, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e et seq*, 1964). However, Trentham and Larwood (1998) suggest that "discrimination against certain social groups such as women still occurs, with women faring worse than men on most measures of economic equity" (p. 1).

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017), "In 2016, 56.8 percent of all women participated in the labor force" (para. 1). Women still face a disparity in earnings, titles, and overall representation (Rosette, Akinola, & Ma, 2018). This correlates with multiple studies that agree regardless of where the discrimination occurs around the world, the struggle for women in the area of gender discrimination comes in many forms, and is still relevant in the workplace (Bennett-Alexander & Hartman, 2015; Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011; Cavaletto, Pacelli, & Pasqua, 2018; Trentham & Larwood, 1998).

Hiring bias and discrimination does not only apply to gender, racial or ethnic minorities. When assessing workplace discrimination amongst other groups, such as those with disabilities, according to Carvalho-Freitas and Stathi (2017), biases may occur due to a belief that those with (physical) disabilities may perform at lower levels because of perceived incompetence. Furthermore, a study by Luck-Sikorski, Riedel-Heller, and Spahlholz (2016) found that "Individuals with obesity are especially confronted with work-related discrimination, which is manifested in lower chances in job applications, the higher probability for layoffs and lower wages" (p. 336). Beyond seeing images that show race, gender, or disability, additional factors that may add to biases during hiring are the subtle use of information from SM, the zip code on a résumé, or even a candidate's name, which can each sway a job offer. Two studies that somewhat conflict with each other are that of Bertrand and Mullainathan (2003) and a study by Darolia et al. (2014) which utilize multiple similar résumés with ethnic and non-ethic names sent to employers which suggested that the applicant was either white or non-white. While both studies show that applicants with non-ethnic names are more likely to be hired, Darolia et al. believed that the difference in a job offer is more due to the residency of the applicant, education, and work history. Therefore, the offer, or lack thereof, is not solely based on the applicant's name. However, both studies point to the fact that information from a SMOS might be used in a discriminatory way where the hiring professional's decision is based on stereotypes and bias over information that is an indicator of the candidate's likely success on the job.

It is important to note that discrimination is not always based on single dimensions of identity as discrimination can be compounded when multiple aspects of identity (such as race and gender) intersect. The term intersectionality was coined by Crenshaw (1989) to shed light on the Black woman's feminist experience of marginalization in the workforce. However,

researchers such as McBride et al. (2015) use the term loosely to explain intersectionality as a, "broader range of oppression (e.g., ageism, class) or social groupings (e.g., age, sexuality, disability)" (p. 3).

Biases

Gawronski, Hofmann, and Wilbur (2006) report that there are three dimensions of attitudes that can affect biases: Source awareness, content awareness, and impact awareness. Source awareness looks at how individuals lack awareness of the more profound reasons for their attitudes. With content awareness, the individual displays behaviors towards someone without being aware of their responses or the presence of attitudes. Whereas, impact awareness assumes that people do not realize that their attitude influences other psychological processes. Each of these sources has the potential to play a part in recruiters' decisions about minority candidates when they learn about the applicants' characteristics on an SMOS.

Research suggests that all people possess underlying implicit biases which may consist of "actions or judgments that are under the control of automatically activated evaluation, without the performer's awareness of that causation" (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998, p. 1464). These biases are patterns that are made up in individuals' minds without acknowledgment. Implicit bias happens in a split second before realizing the judgment has been made. According to Acquisti and Fong (2015), discrimination during the hiring process could either be conscious or unconscious which shows that the hiring professional may be influenced without realizing it.

Consistent with attraction-selection-attrition theory, hiring professionals and managers shape organizations through beliefs about whether a prospective employee will fit the organization (Link & Jeske, 2017; Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995). In an effort to attract and hire the right qualified candidates, employers perform reference checks to find candidates

that match the company's needs, culture, and image. In addition, the individuals most likely to not be hired, leave the organization, voluntarily or involuntarily, will be those not seen to fit in with the dominant group's views of a good employee. According to Hsieh, Weng, and Lin (2016), "Organizational identification occurs when a member perceives his or her own identity to overlap with that of the organization, linking himself or herself to organizational membership" (p. 2) and playing an important part in attracting desirable and talented candidates to apply for employment. In a society where image can affect a company's growth, having the right employee representation matters. However, with this logic, employers might exert bias for or against minority candidates depending upon the image they have about what the organization should be like, possibly encouraging diversity or reinforcing the current demographic. Human capital and reliable business decisions in hiring become vital to recruiters for the success of the organization.

A large percentage of employers are turning to SMOSs to find information on would-be hires (Grasz, 2009). In a Microsoft survey, lifestyle, inappropriate comments, questionable images, and videos are the top reasons for rejecting a candidate (Cross-Tab, 2010). With the attitude that it is acceptable and commonplace to look at SMOSs to vet, it should be expected that decisions of the hiring professional may be altered or changed depending on what they find. However, with this often-informal method of researching candidates, which requires little accountability for how information is collected or used, the drawbacks can be severe not only for the hiring company but the prospective employee as well. According to Hahn et al. (2014), "Studies to date have relied on measures of explicit attitudes to indicate awareness, which confounds awareness with the propositional validation process believed to underlie these explicit attitudes" (p. 3). That is: people may not be able to notice their own attitudes as anything less

than intuitive rather than biases that stem from past experiences. A problem that organizations may need to consider is that cyber-vetting using SMOS may create biases that influence hiring decisions against minorities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to research how hiring professionals' use SMOS during hiring processes and how biases may be activated against minority candidates during this process. Hiring professionals have the responsibility of vetting candidates before making an offer of employment that may include cyber-vetting or standard reference checks with former employers. However, managers or search committee members might also look up a candidate through an SMOS out of their curiosity in a more informal or unofficial way, still influencing their views of the candidate. This purpose statement assumes, as supported by the implicit bias literature, that biases exist and are a prevalent feature of human thinking, behavior, and interaction.

Research Question

How do hiring professionals apply biases to minority candidates when conducting social media and online searches (SMOS) during the cyber-vetting of applicants?

Significance of the Study

This study has the potential to bring awareness to the role of recruiters' biases, including implicit biases when using SMOS to cyber-vet (perform a background check) candidates or during the broader process of hiring, as well as understand the opportunities within the cyber-vetting process when biases may be activated by SMOS. This study can help employers and candidates to identify how hiring professionals use SMOS during the process of cyber-vetting and how biases might be activated and avoided. This may support human resource management

training, drafting of employment policies on the use of SMOS, and education of candidates on the impact of their public SM profiles.

Definitions

Colorism: Prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group (Colorism, n.d.).

Cyber-vetting: A process by which employers acquire information about candidates by using online sources to research and make hiring decisions (Berkelaar, 2010).

E-recruiting: Practices and activities carried on by the organization that utilizes a variety of electronic means to fill open positions effectively and efficiently (Lee, 2005).

Employment Discrimination: Disparate treatment occurs when different standards are applied to different groups (Ziegert & Hanges, 2005).

Human Capital: The values and capabilities (knowledge, skills, and abilities) of employees (Becker, Murphy, & Tamura, 1990).

Intersectionality: "A theoretical perspective in sociology that stresses the cross-cutting, linked nature of inequality and multiplicity of statuses all people occupy" (Healey & O'Brien, 2015, pp. A-2).

Minorities: Members share a visible trait or characteristic that differentiates them from other groups. This status affects access to wealth and income, prestige, and power (Healey, 2012)

Short-listing: A reduced list of candidates for some situation that has been cut down from a larger list (Bright & Hutton, 2000).

Overview of Chapters

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 described SMOS during personnel selection. It covered the problem statement, explained the purpose of the study, and stated the

research questions used to guide the study. Chapter 2 provides a background of literature on hiring patterns, biases, SM, minorities, and discrimination laws. Chapter 3 will describe the methodology used to collect and analyze the data of the study. Chapter 4 presents the demographic information for the participant group interviewed and the results of analysis of the interviews conducted. Lastly, Chapter 5 discusses the results and implications of the study, as well as suggesting opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will provide a review of the literature relevant to examining biases that occur when hiring professionals utilize SMOS for recruiting. The literature review begins by comparing hiring patterns including standard reference checks and cyber-vetting. This researcher will explore the biases, discrimination, and stereotypes that may occur when using technology to cyber-vet candidates. This literature review will also include popular SMOSs used by candidates, research on SM recruitment and selection, privacy for candidates' personal or business information on postings such as images or texts, and will conclude with due diligence when cyber-vetting and how information found online can or should be used.

Hiring Patterns

It has been customary practice for businesses to perform due diligence screenings before offering employment. Reference checks protect the company from hiring negligent employees while ensuring the validity of the information given by the candidate on the application with the goal of employing the best possible person for the job. In a study of hiring professionals by Beason and Belt (1976), 77% of 150 respondents obtained reference checks through telephone calls and mailed letters. In the same study, 68.85% of the employers sought references after the interview but before an offer was made, while approximately 13% attained information before the applicant was even interviewed (Beason & Belt, 1976). However, the use of SMOS have become far more ubiquitous in recruitment and selection, as SMOS might be conducted at any time, formally or informally, once candidates apply.

Recruitment Process

Figure 3 represents the typical external staffing supply chain (Cascio & Boudreau, 2011). The goal of any organization when hiring is to attract and hire the best possible candidate in the

most cost and time effective way possible. The external staffing supply chain is a widespread process that organizations use to find and hire employees. Here, the candidates flow through stages and are filtered and then eliminated until the best candidate remains and is offered and accepts a position. The talent flow (top row) represents each step that a candidate goes through to become employed. The staffing process (bottom row) shows the filtering and elimination sequence that corresponds with the top row until the process is complete (Cascio & Boudreau, 2011). Building and planning might include preparing a job description, recruiting includes when the company advertises the position, screening would involve various tools that provide information about candidates (e.g., résumés, interviews, tests, reference checks, SMOS), selection includes informal (e.g., gut-feel) or formal (e.g., weighting of various criteria to create fit score) judgments about which candidates will advance, and the offer and close is when the organization makes the candidate an offer and negotiates a final employment agreement.

External Staffing Supply Chain

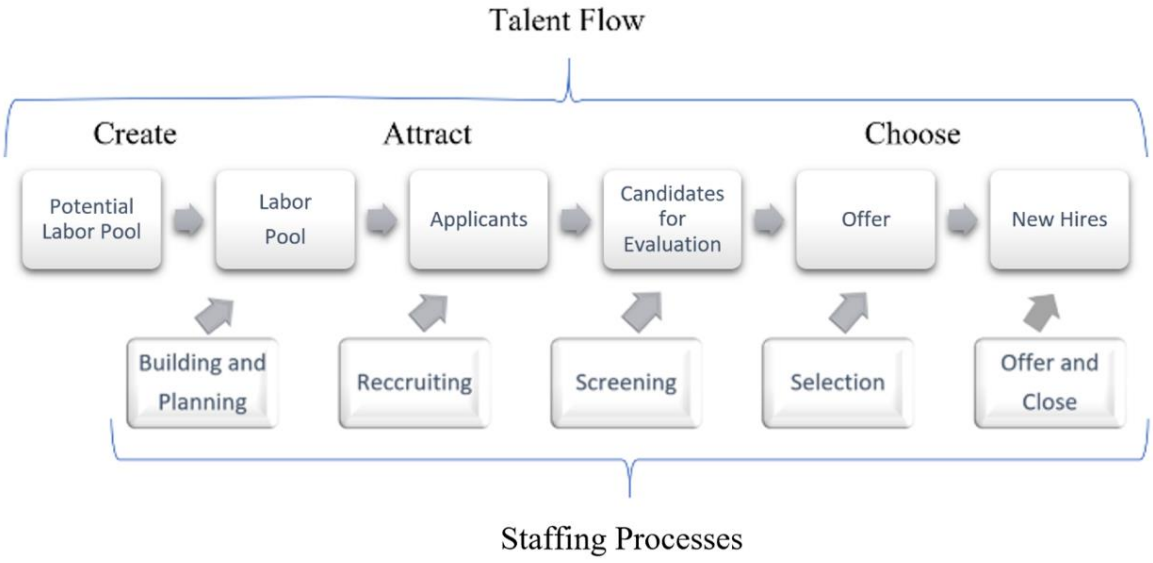

Figure 3. External staffing supply chain (Adapted from Cascio and Boudreau, 2011)

For the purposes of this study, my interest centers most on the screening and selection stages when hiring professionals review evidence and materials (including conducting SMOS) and make judgments about the candidates.

Reference Checks and Predictability

Reference checks of yesteryear and cyber-vetting of today overlap in that they both seek to find information on the prospective hire. Conventionally, employers used three primary strategies to help alleviate uncertainty and check references on candidates through documentation (e.g., CVs, application forms), references, and interviews (Carr, 2016). This allowed employers to passively receive information on employees regarding attitudes, training, accomplishments, certifications, and awards through organizations or individuals with prior knowledge of the applicant. However, during the 70s and 80s, many employers were faced with lawsuits from previous employees because of negative references that were given. This movement against employers affected how information on past employees was shared, causing organizations to limit information given to dates of employment and job title (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Schmidt and Hunter (1998) continue that due to the lawsuits, the legal climate shifted as laws were enacted to protect employers when responding to reference checks on past employees.

Schmidt and Hunter (1998) examined and summarized over 85 years of research inclusive of millions of employees in the effectiveness of 19 selection procedures (e.g., personality, interviews, intelligence assessment, and biodata, job skills, job knowledge), and how well various procedures work together to validate the selection of an applicant and the relationship between job performance and General Mental Ability (GMA) of the candidate. Here, GMA becomes a measure to assess learning, understanding, and problem-solving which according to Schmidt and Hunter, “Make it possible for employers today to substantially increase

the productivity, output, and learning ability of their workforces by using procedures that work well and by avoiding those that do not" (1998, p. 262). One limitation of this previous research was the lack of inclusion of gender and minority subgroups which may lead to incorrect assumptions about the role of selection tools in predicting job performance of minority groups. However, the study found that combinations of methods of selection procedures had different abilities to predicting job performance. In particular, age and years of education were weak predictors (predicting less than 1% of job performance), while job experience in years (3%), biographical data measures (12.3%), and reference checks (7%) showed some predictive ability. Stronger predictors included work sample tests (29%), structured interviews (26%), and peer ratings (24%).

While this research is 20 years old, it shows the potentially weak validity of using biographical data and reference checks in selection and recruitment, which might also extend to employers feeling the need to rely on SMOS to scrape-up information about candidates which can be used indiscriminately as a tool for surveillance.

Cyber-vetting

The Internet is used as a vessel to communicate. With an expectation of privacy, individuals may freely post information over social platforms without thinking that a prospective employer would look at what would be assumed to be private postings. However, cyber-vetting has become an opportunity for organizations to investigate any and all personal information found on SM platforms. Cyber-vetting is the new way for companies to perform reference checks by using online SM networking profiles, usually without the candidate's permission. According to Berkelaar's (2010) definition, cyber-vetting occurs when employers acquire

information about candidates from informal, online sources such as SM profiles to make employment decisions based on findings.

The use of the internet to research candidates allows employers to see if "the employee will 'fit' the culture of the organization" (Alexander, Mader, & Mader, 2017, p. 236), as well as form an opinion if the candidate will fit in with existing employees as well as be a positive representation of the company. While searching SMOS only provides a snapshot of the candidate, it can sometimes override what may be identified on a résumé, which can potentially hurt a candidate.

A study published by Microsoft reports that 59% of recruiters utilize "photo and video sharing sites" (Cross-Tab, 2010, p. 8) when cyber-vetting applicants. Moreover, even though not all information posted may be true, 90% of U.S. hiring managers admit to being concerned about the online information that is discovered during the vetting process (Cross-Tab, 2010). The use of SMOS during cyber-vetting has likely grown since 2010, given the growth of SM in general. While the material and images found online may not matter to the user, amongst other cultural and educational factors, those online images can be of great concern to the hiring professional. Zschirnt and Ruedin (2016) have found that ethnic minority groups lack education as well as the knowledge (familiarity with organizational norms) and means (e.g., networks) that their counterparts have to be successful employees. Beliefs such as this emphasize that some hiring managers hold negative attitudes that affect their assessment of minorities' ability to adequately perform in the work setting. In the eyes of the employer, "access to and use of previously inaccessible information may allow more cost-effective and successful investments in human capital" (Berkelaar, 2010, p. 4).

A study by Berkelaar (2014) examined how employers and candidates made sense out of cyber-vetting. That is, how employers use SM to gain information regarding candidates for personal selection. In this analysis of 45 employers and 44 job applicants, semi-structured interviews focused on personal selection and approaches to finding employment. The results found that both employers and employees believed that cyber-vetting's use was inevitable for gaining social behavior information, having transparency, and predicting if a candidate is right for the job. In contrast, Ghoshray (2013) expressed that "an employer making employment decisions based on such information could erroneously draw inferences on the suitability of an applicant, which may expose the employer to liability for discriminatory employment practices" (p. 652). Therefore, the validity of using SMOS when researching candidates for interviews or employment opportunities can be questioned.

Discrimination, Stereotyping, Bias, and Colorism

Discrimination

It is both reasonable and relevant that companies seek and use various sources to research candidates for hire. However, in an age of concerns regarding libel and defamation claims, many organizations have created policies that attempt to dictate that employers release only dates of employment and wages that the former employee made while in the organization's employ (Cooper, 1997). This section looks at laws relevant to discrimination in hiring minorities.

Discrimination has been and is still a widespread practice. The 1960s practice of placing employment ads in newspapers explicitly requesting that 'Whites only apply' can be likened to the current use of SMOS by some managers making decisions based on visual images, with the primary difference being that there is no clear evidence of decisions not to hire based on SMOS. The enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 changed many employment practices, but there is

still more work to be done. A study by Turner, Fix, and Struyk (1991) found that "unequal treatment of black job seekers is entrenched and widespread, contradicting claims that hiring practices today either favor Blacks or are effectively color blind" (p. 2). Therefore, in agreement with the notion, that even in 1991, at a time when most people thought discrimination was a behavior of the past, its relevance in the workforce was and still is prevalent (Aigner & Cain, 1977; Antwi-Boasiako, 2008; Bennett-Alexander & Hartman, 2015).

As the use of SMOS often enables employers to engage with candidates without retribution legally or from the candidate, the law has not yet caught up with technology to protect applicants from any form of employment discrimination or stereotyping that may arise from information found through online cyber-vetting (Ghoshray, 2013). Therefore, as individuals continue to post content on SMOS, employers can and will continue to use the internet to try to make the hiring selections based on images or other information that is found online.

Stereotyping

Coined by Walter Lipman in 1922, the word stereotype took shape from its original meaning of "A printer's metal plate that could hold an entire page of print" (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013, p. 72). The meaning now as many know it is the "…pictures in our head" that depict all members of the same cultural group as having the same (often negative) attributes (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; Lippmann, 1921).

The earliest research located on stereotyping dates back to 1926. Stuart Rice, a sociologist, and statistician did an experimental classroom project on stereotypes and judgments by surveying 258 Dartmouth University students using nine portraits. The participants were made aware of the titles of the men on the sheet, without saying which title belonged with the person. The students were then instructed to match the picture to the correct title. The nine

portraits were put on a sheet of paper with a number under each picture, they included: The Premier of Prance [sic]; Vice-president of the American Federation of Labor; first Ambassador of the Soviet Government at Paris; Deputy Comptroller of the Currency; former Governor of New York; a bootlegger; a top representative of United States Steel Corporation; a manufacturer of food products; and a Senator of Pennsylvania. This research showed that the student's perceptions and stereotypes of the pictures, the level of intelligence, and the supposed identity of the men in the portraits were similar. This study on judgment and stereotypes found that anyone is capable of becoming a subject of discrimination when biases exist based on a look (e.g., haircut, clothing). In that, Rice (1926) concluded that "When personality is judged by photographs, or by first uncorrected impressions of appearance, on the other hand, it is inevitable that striking errors will be made" (p. 276).

Further research published in 1933 by psychologists Daniel Katz and Kenneth Braly sought to enhance the research of the pictures-in-the-head that people carry around about certain professions or positions in society. Katz and Braly believed that humans have varying degrees of responses that permit one to either avoid or accept a particular racial group or individual. In particular, this is seen with Blacks due to skin color (p. 280). Here they assert, that the response is a learned behavior of despising a race or group. In this study, 100 Princeton students were asked to match 84 traits that they believe were characteristic of 10 groups inclusive of Germans, Italians, Negroes, Irish, English, Jews, Americans, Chinese, Japanese, and Turks. They were then asked to narrow that number down to the top five characteristics that matched the particular race. The results of the study showed that of all the races, Negros had the most clear-cut stereotypes with the most significant numbers of negative attachments to characteristics and traits by the students. Eighty-four percent of the students surveyed were in definite agreement that Negroes

were superstitious and 75% agreeing that they (Negros) were lazy, with a less definite agreement of characteristics for the other groups with the exception of Turks (54% thought they were cruel) and Jews (79% characterized them as shrewd). From this study, Katz and Braly (1933) surmised, that the "cultural pattern of prejudice is in part a public attitude" (p. 281).

The Princeton study by Katz and Braly has been replicated through the years, most recently by Madon et al. (2001). This research focused on the same ethnic groups utilized in the Princeton project and examined the content rather than the process of stereotyping. While the participants of this updated study were of varied ethnic backgrounds, the results still showed that the same or similar beliefs exist among various groups and their characteristic traits, but due to the change in times and culture, the results were not as biased as they were in 1926. Madon et al. (2001) suggest that, "…change is difficult to achieve and that even if stereotypes do change, that change may not translate into improved intergroup relations because new stereotypes may be just as unfavorable and consensual as the stereotypes that they replaced" (p. 1008).

As these studies lend to the knowledge in the field of research, they are limited as they only target college students and their assumptions on characteristics of various ethnic groups. To accurately predict the behavior of hiring professionals and the biases they may have, it would be advantageous to research the actual patterns of hiring professionals when using SMOS to cyber-vet candidates for hire.

Stereotyping in the workplace is nothing new as it has become a way of separating 'them from us' regardless of skills and experience. According to Derous et al. (2009), ethnic names or pictures may be irrelevant information relative to the performance of the job but are utilized by recruiters to either help or hurt the candidate's chances. Other physical features likely to raise an eyebrow to a hiring manager may be visible tattoos or body piercings (McElroy, Summers, &

Moore, 2014), and skin tone. Maddox and Gray found that both Black and white participants in their study prefer light skin tones rather than darker skin tones (2002).

Uhlmann and Cohen (2007) identify the importance of this type of hiring discrimination as increasing "not only with the ambiguity of the situation but also with decision-makers' sense of their own personal objectivity and invulnerability to bias" (p. 2). Before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, discrimination was considered legal behavior (Quillian, 2006). This behavior allowed whites to support discrimination legally against nonwhites when hiring.

The struggle for many groups of minorities is as prevalent as it was 40 years ago. This struggle in securing employment continues when a minority candidate tries to secure employment. In contrast, Tomaskovic-Devey and Stainback (2007) argue that as a part of the diversity movement in organizations, as the number of minority employees within an organization rises, stereotyping and biases inevitably decrease due to the heterogeneity of employees and increased contact between minorities and majorities. Duher and Bono assert that "Change is due to organizational interventions, such as diversity training aimed at decreasing gender stereotypes and other prejudiced attitudes" (p. 817). As these statements continue to be a work in progress, Wilson (2014) leaves the reminder that, "Although our country has progressed beyond these atrocities, there is still progress that needs to be made in the areas of racism, prejudice, and discrimination" (p. 86).

Racism and discrimination are generational *diseases*. The symptoms are shared from generation to generation, yet a solution has yet to be found and implemented. Studies document biases, stereotyping, and discrimination in hiring decisions made by recruiters every day. Biases, stereotyping, and discrimination are about treating people differently based on race, ethnic origin, religion, or gender status (*Civil Rights Act of 1964 § 7, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e et seq*, 1964).

Regardless of the attention that it receives, “[Discrimination] increases not only with the ambiguity of the situation but also with decision-makers’ sense of their own personal objectivity and invulnerability to bias” (Uhlmann & Cohen, 2007, p. 2).

Even though Title VII prohibits discrimination based on race and color, discrimination exists, and the penalties can be costly for employers. When employers decide to not offer employment based on race or color, they allow for the opportunity to be sued by the candidate as they (minorities) are protected by the Constitution and state tort laws (Bennett-Alexander & Hartman, 2015). However, such cases can be challenging to prove.

Bias

Greenwald and Banaji (1995) state that in implicit cognition, "traces of past experience affect some performance, even though the influential earlier experience is not remembered in the usual sense” (1995, pp. 4-5). This means that past experiences with people, places, or things can evoke an implicit bias or attitude that is either favorable or unfavorable to that situation or people in the situation. Attitudes can also develop through social learning, such as observing others’ responses to people of a particular group, or from hearing stories recounted about specific groups (Bandura and Walters, 1977). Biases are judgments that happen without the acknowledgment of the participant making the assumption (1995). In other words, a bias can be either a preference for or prejudice against a person or group that is sometimes unconsciously based on attitudes and behavior (Jolls & Sunstein, 2006).

An implicit bias may elicit attitudes in the hiring professional that can result in not offering a deserving position or promotion to a minority candidate due to a deep-seated belief (Green, 2003). The phenomenon of bias in the workforce still exists (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; Derous et al., 2017a; Jolls & Sunstein, 2006) although it has been, and continues to be

disguised as a “blanket policy or discrete, identifiable decision to exclude [more] than as a perpetual tug on opportunity and advancement” (Green, 2003, p. 91). Regardless of the specific name that is placed before the word ‘bias,’ the outcome of the intended meaning still represents stereotypical discrimination or actions as a result of some sort of prejudice. Many times in hiring, these attitudes and biases may be implicit, done without full awareness (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Greenwald & Krieger, 2006; Lee, Lindquist, & Payne, 2018; Paul, 1998; Pérez, 2010). Nonetheless, it is critical, and relevant to bring the phenomenon of bias to light.

Finding what factors have a role in hiring discrimination opens the door to assessing when and how recruiters or managers are likely to discriminate (Uhlmann & Cohen, 2007). There is then an opportunity to provide interventions for hiring professionals to ensure a fair and unbiased opportunity for employment, or for candidates to be informed on how to avoid evoking potential biases against them, thereby empowering the job seeker. A study by Lee et al. (2018) investigated emotions of hiring professionals and how those feelings of fear affected attitudes (positively or negatively) towards a candidate. This research asserts that, “Negative affect toward Black Americans on implicit measures predicts behaving less warmly to Black individuals during social interactions” (p. 2). The study also found that, “Participants primed with fear demonstrated the greatest risk perception, but only if they also experienced the negative affect induction” (p. 3). This means that fear can provoke biases if the hiring professional had a negative experience with an outgroup. Not only do minorities contend with implicit and explicit bias, but colorism at times can lead an employer to make assumptions about a candidate solely based on the color of their skin more than if they are qualified for the job (Hunter, 2007; Reed, 2017).

Colorism

Another type of bias that is a relevant issue for job seekers as well as hiring professionals may be skin tone bias or colorism. Resembling stereotyping, discrimination, and prejudice, colorism is a broad spectrum of bias that combines positive and negative views of skin tone (light vs. dark). Colorism directly benefits some minorities due to a preference of lighter skin tones (Adams, Kurtz-Costes, & Hoffman, 2016; Hunter, 2007; Maddox & Gray, 2002; Marira & Mitra, 2013; Ryabov, 2019).

Studies that look at colorism also show that skin color can have a direct effect in regards to employment and wages (Hannon & DeFina, 2016; Hunter, 2007), equating that regardless of skills and education, candidates with lighter skin tones will typically be interviewed, hired or accepted before a candidate that has darker skin (Hall, 1992; Keith, Nguyen, Taylor, Mouzon, & Chatters, 2017). Most of the time, favor is towards lighter skin tones, however, depending on the person making the judgment, some studies have shown that darker complexions could be favored (Marira & Mitra, 2013).

Colorism affects many minorities daily, as the judgment comes down to the lightness versus darkness of the skin tone and the overall perception that individuals with lighter skin tone may be better educated, come from an elevated social circle, and have better occupational skills (Hunter, 2007; Keith et al., 2017; Marira & Mitra, 2013). That said, the phenomenon of colorism does not only apply to white hiring professionals or decision makers. The trickle-down effect of colorism has also reached into the minority population itself where intraracial colorism is used against members of its own race (Marira & Mitra, 2013). Intraracial colorism may be seen and studied as implicit bias. However, this type of bias typically goes against darker and

light skinned minorities while the favor is placed on medium skinned individuals (Marira & Mitra, 2013).

At a time when SMOS can play a remarkable role in recruitment, discrimination and bias may be more significant than expected. In a study using job characteristics versus minority status, Derous et al. (2017) found that:

> Applicants' skin tone colour instigated more ethnic discrimination than their ethnic-sounding names. Dark-skinned applicants suffered much more hiring discrimination than their light-skinned counterparts. The degree of discrimination, however, depended greatly on the particular combination of job client contact and status. (p. 2)

That is, stereotypes and biases are formed based on the degree of color (light or dark) of a person's skin, in which then an assumption of perceived intelligence is made that places the applicant in a lower category. A study by Ryabov (2019) exhibited that physical attractiveness of minorities based on the color of their skin showed that "lighter skin tone was associated to higher ratings of physical attractiveness for Black adults and this association was stronger for women than for men" (p. 68). Thus, meaning that individuals deemed physically attractive had better opportunities for employment, wages, and education than those with darker skin.

Hunter (2007) discusses the hidden discrimination also known as colorism in the treatment of light-skinned people versus those with darker skin. She examines perks that light-skinned people have when it comes to job status, wages, and the ability to live in better neighborhoods simply based on the tone of skin (Keith et al., 2017). However, colorism does not stop there. According to Hunter (2007), many times, skin color and ethnic identity go hand-in-hand as the:

> Task of proving oneself to be a legitimate or authentic member of an ethnic community is a significant burden for the light-skinned and Latino, African-American, and Asian American communities. For some people of color, authenticity is the vehicle through which dark-skinned people take back their power from lighter skinned people. (p. 244)

Hunter (2007) found that skin color was associated with both acceptance, and discrimination not just at work, but in one's own cultural setting. Discrimination does not just happen at work, as Hunter stresses the fact that some cultures also use colorism against each other through name-calling, shunning, or exclusion. Due to this focus on color, in cultures all over the world, individuals look to bleach their skin in an attempt to be more socially accepted through the use of pills or chemicals to attain a status of acceptance. Concluding this study, Hunter (2007) believed that by understanding colorism, society could begin to tackle the larger project of racial discrimination. The sometimes-unspoken fascination with skin tone or race then has the ability to elicit negative attitudes during SMOS that are enforced by past experiences (mental or physical), which can then be imposed on individuals without merit.

Social Media

SM plays a significant role during the hiring process; maybe more than previously believed. SM profiles are like reference calling cards allowing companies access to look into the personal lifestyle of a would-be hire without needing to talk to business references. The use of the Internet continues to grow (Chaffey, 2019), yet the use of social networks for recruitment, hiring, and firing is still a relatively new practice (Davison, Maraist, & Bing, 2011). According to Davidson et al., the reason for the surge in popularity and acceptance of social recruiting is "widely accepted because of its close relation to the act of posting a job advertisement on the Internet" (p. 154).

SM sites vary in features that can be used by all customers. There are mechanisms within SM sites that allow for consumers to post pictures, comments, videos, and music that permit the user to tailor the experience for friends, family, and self (Sánchez Abril, Levin, & Del Riego, 2012). These features not only connect the user to friends and family, but it can also be used

against that user as an extra method of selection for a hiring professional (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009). With this practice, there are currently no laws in place to monitor or deter employers from utilizing SMOS to vet candidates. Unless information discovered from these sources (e.g., a candidate's race) is explicitly used for hiring decisions and the candidate learns of the use of information (e.g., an internal whistleblower), they are unable to file a claim against the prospective employer with the EEOC. LinkedIn provides users with some information about who has examined their profile recently, but this does not provide information on which information was reviewed and how it was used. Foreseeably, adverse impact ratios (Bennett-Alexander & Hartman, 2015) might also be used to discover that an employer is inadvertently rejecting more candidates of a specific minority group based upon the use of SMOS. Adverse impact is the process by which some courts determine if an employer has a higher tendency to reject protected minority applicants based upon the ratio of applicants of each racial or other minority group who make it through each selection hurdle (or through the total process) compared to non-protected groups. However, this would be a complicated and unlikely outcome, especially if no record is kept of hiring professionals or managers that use SMOS.

SMOS enables individuals to connect and maintain relationships with others (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). With billions of users logging on and posting daily over multiple platforms and emails, achieving any level of privacy is challenging and requires knowledge of each platform's privacy options. According to Zaremohzzabieh et al., "Social network sites have become a global phenomenon and being one of the greatest importance means of communication" (2014, p. 107). Smith and Anderson (2018) have found that 68% of users log into Facebook more than any other SM site. Their research also shows that 90% of users that engage on Facebook were more likely to use other SM networking sites. This section will

discuss various SM sites that might be used in SMOS, how information is posted and shared by the user, and how that information could be used by an employer to include or exclude a candidate from employment.

Facebook

Facebook came to life at Harvard University in 2004 strictly for student use until 2006 (Rosenbloom, 2007). Facebook was created to "enable its users to present themselves in an online profile, accumulate 'friends' who can post comments on each other's pages, and view each other's profiles" (Ellison et al., 2007, p. 1143). With this platform, users have choices as to how much information others can see of their postings or if their profile is public. A national study published in Pew Research Center found that from March 7 – April 4, 2016, out of 1,520 adults, 79% use Facebook, making it the most popular and starting point social networking platform (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016). However, as of 2018, Smith and Anderson (2018), found that the SM trend was changing with the emergence of new platforms. Facebook had decreased to 68% of US users, surpassed only by YouTube, a video sharing site (78%).

LinkedIn

LinkedIn, like Facebook, is a popular SM site. LinkedIn was established as a platform that would aid in managing professional careers by providing a platform that allows the candidate user to upload résumés, videos, and showcase references for professional development; and the employer the opportunity to observe without snooping. According to Ma and Leung (2018), "in 2011,77% of employees in the US posted their profiles on LinkedIn, 15% of whom used it daily or frequently" (p. 2). Having a profile on LinkedIn has become not only a way to expose candidates' résumés to thousands of employers, but it also encourages and helps build professional relationships. "LinkedIn (and Twitter) focus on more specific aspects of

community and technology, respectively" (Keenan & Shiri, 2009, p. 438), rather than simply networks of family and friends which is often the case on Facebook.

Twitter

Twitter is a microblogging service that was introduced in March 2006 allowing its users to briefly blog using 140 characters or less. As of 2017, Twitter commands more than 328 million users, and a "single digit" percentage of users can tweet up to 280 strokes (Tsukayama, 2017). As it would appear that by limiting consumer tweets by set characters, users have found ways to get around the limitation by using images with content that can go beyond set character limits. With the newness of microblogging, Twitter is quickly becoming an open market for consumers to share thoughts and images to compete with Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Because Twitter is a popular venue to sharing social commentary, it is possible that a job candidates' postings on this site may attract an employer's attention.

YouTube

YouTube was launched in 2005 by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim as an attempt to provide users with the ability to connect with friends by easily uploading and sharing video without much technical background (Burgess & Green, 2018). Created as a means for "Tubers" to share videos of self-expression of everyday life, music videos, and tutorials, YouTube has become a mainstay with the largest population of users both in the U.S. and around the world with 73% of population uploading and sharing in 2018 (Smith & Anderson, 2018; Statista, 2019). While YouTube is not an employment-related site, it is certainly possible that videos on YouTube may be identified during SMOS if an employer is searching using the candidate's name.

Research on Social Media, Recruitment, and Selection

El Ouirdi, Pais, Segers, and El Ouirdi (2016) investigated how the assessment of applicants who use SM differs based on recruiter characteristics. Focusing on two main characteristics of the recruiter, gender and national culture (Dutch and Italian), this study addressed three primary questions based on the recruiters' use of SM to pre-vet candidates. Presenting material from the recruiter's side based on gender and national culture, El Ouirdi et al. (2016) addressed both the professional and nonprofessional content found on applicants' SM private pages, then assessed the recruiter's likeliness to exclude applicants from the hiring process due to those findings. El Ouirdi et al. (2016) state:

> The results of the present study have implications for both job seekers and recruiters. From the applicant's perspective, the presence of some content deemed nonprofessional on their social media is detrimental to their image in the recruiter's eyes across genders and cultures…For recruiters, it is particularly important to design standard screening procedures to ensure fairness and impartiality, by determining the weight of individual professional and nonprofessional items in applicant's overall social media-based assessment. (p. 420)

Additional findings suggest female recruiters were deemed more likely to value professional content on an SM site over their male counterparts when making hiring decisions. The association between the recruiters' national culture and nonprofessional postings on the applicants' profile showed that Dutch recruiters had a more negative assessment over the Italians when looking at nonprofessional content. Overall, the assessment of nonprofessional content led all recruiters to exclude candidates from the recruitment process.

Rattan et al. (2019) completed a three-part study which identified hiring behaviors and biases in non-Asian participants depending on primary social groups when negative gender stereotypes or positive racial stereotypes were more salient. The research examined participants who interviewed an Asian American woman for a position in (study 1) employment in IT; (study

2) employment in either technology or English literature; and (study 3) a position as an HTML Java tutor. Identical résumés and SM profiles were created for each study with the only difference being primary information (e.g., name Gloria, Chia-Jung Gloria Tsay, and Gloria Tsay) and the location of identifying information on an résumé (e.g., sex, race, spoken languages) Rattan et al. (2019) state that the goal of the study was to,

> [D]etermine whether an identical applicant could be evaluated differently, and receive different outcomes, depending on the relative salience of her negatively stereotyped gender, and positively stereotyped Asian, identities (p. 91).

Rattan et al. (2019) also suggest the importance of stereotypes are based on what an individual is primed to perceive. In this study, the researchers identified that stereotypes are activated according to a perceived behavior of another person or social group (the candidate), which influenced access to employment opportunities and fair wages. This study could pertain to any minority seeking employment in a field where social group becomes the norm for determining "fit" in an organization. For example, if a Black woman applies for a job in a predominantly white field (e.g., technology), a person may see a woman first; however, treat her differently because they see that it is a Black woman wearing African garb. In this example, being a woman is not the problem; however, being a Black woman may engage stereotypes that make others (decision makers) think less of her abilities as an employee.

Privacy

The Internet is often seen as a panopticon (Barnes, 2006) as it allows for a "constant view of individuals through parasocietal mechanisms that influence behavior simply because of the possibility of being observed" (para. 12). As technology evolves with new applications and ways for users to share information, the freedom to create content, and the ease of connecting on commercial sites, how people use SM has also evolved. Users of SM sites believe that sharing personal day-to-day happenings through posting is a convenient way to connect with family,

friends, and colleagues. However, to some, the content of such posts may seem questionable. For the most part, what is posted on the Internet is hard to erase. Like a tattoo, it can be permanent reminder of history. The United States is behind on updating laws that may remove damning history; fortunately, not all countries have the same mindset and some have worked to give users the ability to erase some of their negative history (Wehner, 2017).

The European Commission for Justice, Fundamental Rights, and Citizenship have been leading the way for change with the most comprehensive privacy and security data laws in the world to the issues of online privacy with the Right to be Forgotten legislation. The right to be forgotten minimizes the negative impact that prior actions (posting career damaging content on SM) can have on a person's future (Rosen, 2012). This act which has been implemented in Europe and Argentina (Jones et al., 2015; Minc, 2017; Rosen, 2012; Wehner, 2017) allows the user to minimize or remove negative images or content that has been posted, that has the potential to ruin opportunities for employment, credit, or education due to stigmas that may be placed by decision makers based on information found when cyber-vetting.

Currently, the New York State Assembly is working on a bill comparable to The Right to be Forgotten, which would become amendments to the civil rights and civil laws practiced in the state (Wehner, 2017). This act, if passed, would hold SM sites like Google Search legally responsible for terminating *unwanted* material as deemed by the user from their search engines upon request of the user. According to Wehner (2017), the user requesting removal would need to prove that the information posted was "…inaccurate, irrelevant, inadequate, or excessive in order to qualify for removal from search indexes" (para. 2).

However, these deletions do not go uncontested. Therefore, there are no standing privacy laws as the EU has in place with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). According to

sites such as Facebook, Google and others, there are notable issues in removing content from SM. One major issue being misuse or abuse of pictures or information by individuals looking to censor anything they do not like. Secondary issues include, lack of transparency, restraint on journalism and freedom of speech, the need for removal may be outweighed by general public interest (Minc, 2017). Even as the process of creating laws and amendments begin to change in the states, users must learn to think beyond the *here and now* concept when posting materials that can be used against them in the future.

Unfortunately, job seekers are not only visiting SM sites; they are posting images and content that may not be considered as appropriate by prospective employers, therefore opening the door to the reality of bias and discrimination. Users could, therefore, make better use of their privacy options on these sites and learn to use the sites in a way that better supports their career.

Due Diligence and Cyber-Vetting

Vetting a candidate is ultimately up to the hiring organization, and its human resource department to thoroughly research all sources necessary to make an educated decision either to hire or pass on an applicant. As gaining credible information (other than employment dates) from previous employers becomes harder to attain (Cooper, 1997), the internet provides multiple resources in which valuable information can be found, and has increasingly become an additional source to gain insights about prospective hires prior to an interview or a formal offer of employment (Grasz, 2016). As employers move towards cyber-vetting, the chances of finding information that may not be located on an application becomes greater with each SM site used.

In the early years of cyber-vetting, some employers requested user names and passwords of candidates with the attempt to vet SM pages for images and texts that would prevent the hiring of the applicant (Delarosa, 2014). In 2012, Maryland became the first state to pass into

legislation the User Name and Password Privacy Protection Act as a result of a complaint filed with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Robert Collins, a Maryland Department correctional and safety officer, was asked for both user and password for all SM accounts as part of recertification after taking time off. After reluctantly complying, his employer went through all of his accounts looking at pictures and texts during the interview searching for suspected misconduct; of which nothing was found.

At the time of this research, 26 states have enacted legislation that prevents employers from asking for user names and passwords to make hiring decisions (Legislation, 2018). Many of the state-imposed statues, however, have provisions which permit employers to obtain information about employees by way of a publicly owned SM site that is unprotected, as well as the right to obtain login and passwords when the information to be searched is on the employer's network or equipment (Park, 2014). This is to say, that laws protect individuals when information sought after is of a private nature (e.g., private SM page, emails, messages); however, publicly used sites (without privacy features) are not covered by the same legislation and therefore become legally accessible by anyone including decision makers.

Theories

Five theories are reviewed which were each seen to be relevant to this study to varying degrees.

Implicit Bias Theory

Although referred to as Implicit Bias Theory or Unconscious Bias Theory (the names are used interchangeably) the meanings are the same. According to Roxburgh and Hansen (n. d.):

> Unconscious bias is a mental shortcut of sorts, necessary as to how we operate as humans, but one that can also without intent, interfere with good decision-making and lead to biased outcomes. Although many decisions we make are objectively informed, through training and reflection, another decision-making process flies under the radar –

> rapid-fire associations and assumptions, based on our prior experience, that operate outside our conscious awareness. (para. 2)

When implicit bias is activated during the vetting process, the hiring professional forms an opinion based on the association of traits with various groups of people. As such, Greenwald et al. (1998) suggest that:

> Implicit attitudes are manifest as actions or judgments that are under the control of automatically activated evaluation, without the performer's awareness of that causation these associations during the hiring process are more times negative thoughts that can exclude qualified candidates. (p. 1464)

For example, a hiring professional may see a Black person and think they do not have enough education for the position, or that they have been in trouble with the law. An employer may see a woman and subconsciously think that she will miss work (more than men) due to family obligations. While the process of reacting with implicit bias by not offering employment may not be the actual intent of the hiring professional, studies show that these types of unconscious thoughts can become a handicap for minorities when looking for employment (Bendick & Nunes, 2012). Research also implies that fear may be a factor for implicit bias. A study performed by Lee et al. (2018) on the link between fear and Black Americans found that "Intentional behavior is based on accessible information, only if it is judged to be true" (p. 12). Meaning that the emotion of fear can engage biases against minorities due to a previous negative experience. Moreover, any instance that reminds a person of a previous negative activity can cause a hiring professional reject a Black candidate based on a memory of fear.

Moreover, according to Jolls and Sunstein (2006), the thought process behind the Implicit Associations Test is that most people react more favorably to white faces and what can be perceived as *normal* names than individuals with brown skin and ethnic names, or those that come from a disadvantaged group. Unfortunately, bias does not stop with race and name choice.

Biases can be elicited due to race, ethnicity, gender, and any other reason one can find to disapprove of another being.

Bobbitt-Zeher (2007) discusses gender discrimination in the workplace and how it continues to thrive on stereotypes based on gender. Workplace disparities include wages, gender differences in the number of each gender in leadership roles, and sometimes sex segregation (e.g., more men in one department). According to Bobbitt-Zeher (2007), "Primary causes of sex discrimination are rooted in cultural beliefs, secondary causes relate to organizational structures, policies, and practices" (p. 767). In this study, using 219 cases to find patterns and themes, Bobbitt-Zeher (2007) examines experiences within organizations to dissect women's experiences into seven types of discrimination and the policies that bind them. Bobbitt-Zeher (2007) gender-based study focused on descriptive and prescriptive stereotyping. Descriptive stereotypes have an expectation that women will be nurturing, whereas the process that a woman should be nurturing would be considered prescriptive. From the cases used, this study found that female workers were looked at as "women first, workers second" (p. 771), suggesting that one's personal life, such as family, makes women less dependable than men. Bobbitt-Zeher (2007) suggests that "In order to eradicate discrimination there must be a shift in culture, structure and individual decision making" (p. 784).

According to Banaji and Greenwald (2013), a mindbug is the "ingrained habit of thought that lead to errors in how we perceive, remember, reason, and make decisions" (p. 4). In this term, Banaji and Greenwald (2013) assert that there are many types of mindbugs (visual, memory, and social) that can affect the process of thoughts that become implicit biases toward people from different social groups. In addition, Bellack (2015) notes that "the mind forms strong alliances with things and people that are familiar while developing subtle biases against

those that aren't" (p. S64). These microaggressions (hurtful behaviors and judgments) are often the thoughts that happen without knowledge that can lead to unconscious bias in and out of the workplace.

Since its inception in 1998, the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald et al., 1998) has become a heavily used instrument to predict implicit bias and attitudes against other races and groups of people. The IAT website provides 14 different tests to predict biases in a range of fields. The IAT assesses its users' rapid judgments that may reflect attitudes which those users would generally be unwilling to share based on positive and negative prompts. For example, after a series of 13 biodata questions, and three general questions, the user is prompted with the word Black in the left upper hand part of the screen and the word white in the upper right-hand corner. A word would then appear, such as a name, in the center of the screen and the user would have to pick who he thinks that name would represent. This is done by pushing either the letter "E" for Black or the letter "I" for white.

A study by Conaway and Bethune (2015) examined stereotypes against student names and how they trigger implicit bias. This study included 147 online instructors and 151 participants who completed the survey. The study relied heavily on a projective implicit attitude test to measure the time reactions to names of racial and ethnic origins. After a brief demographic questionnaire, a Likert scale was used to measure explicit bias towards African-Americans, Caucasians, and Hispanics. The experimental phase of the test required the instructor to sort names into categories of race or ethnicity. The goal of the study was to raise the awareness of online instructors and how they react to names without seeing student faces and the impact that implicit bias can have on determining grades. The findings show that even though an instructor may believe themselves to be unbiased, implicit bias in regard to student names and

ethnicity does exist; however, the degree of bias may differ. Limitations to this study were inclusive of the complexity of instructions of the IAT, issues with finding names that represent a specific culture, and an overall lack of diversity with the sample.

Implicit bias operates at the subconscious level, meaning people do not realize the bias exists. With this notion, the implicit bias may run contrary to conscious belief (Jolls & Sunstein, 2006). Two examples would include, being deeply committed to a cause such as an individual becoming a police officer who has taken an oath to protect and serve a community, but arresting a significantly higher amount of Blacks for lesser charges than Whites. Example two would be, an employer that says he or she hires employees based on skill, not color or race; however, the make-up of employees within the organization is represented by only one class of people (white males). This type of unconscious bias happens daily, most times, without the individual realizing or even meaning to assert this type of negative behavior.

Initiatives to combat racism and discrimination do, however, exist. Eradicating Racism and Colorism from Employment (E-Race) was a five-year project by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was established in 2008 to educate and enforce the legal right to a workplace free of race and color discrimination (Commission, 2017). E-Race was established due to the need for intervention and to address discrimination against minorities in hiring and in the workforce (Bennett-Alexander & Hartman, 2015). With its central location in Washington DC, and 53 field offices in operation, cases filed under Title VII alleging race-based discrimination in the workplace is on the rise (Commission, n.d.). Currently, the laws regarding cyber-vetting and the legality of the practice still require more development. However, a growing number of employers believe this cyber-vetting is acceptable as long as civil rights laws are not violated (Davison et al., 2011; Genova, 2009; Peluchette & Karl, 2009).

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

There is typically a level of uncertainty for any organization when looking to hire employees. Hiring professionals must make decisions on whether a candidate has the skill-set for the job, or if hired, how the person will interact with the rest of the current staff. These two criteria are known as person-job (PJ) and person-organization (PO) and seeks to identify if a candidate will "fit" (Carr, 2016). The goal becomes to lessen any uncertainty prior to hiring, not just using conventional methods of researching a prospect such as applications, résumés, former employers, and references, but to also engaging newer technology such as SM.

Employers' use of SMOS helps to assess the applicant's personality, values, and ethics before hiring by viewing information published by the candidate on websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, or other various SM sites. This openly posted information allows the hiring professional to predict fit, allowing the employer to reduce uncertainty by getting an in-depth and sometimes personal view of behaviors, activities, attitudes, or claims made by the candidate. However, as suggested by Schmidt and Hunter's (1998) study, questions remain as to the validity of this method, (e.g., using biographical information) as information gained through SMOS can be interpreted in various ways (e.g., images) and it possible that the same concerns (e.g., an offensive tattoo, partial ethnic heritage) might not be known about existing employees, as well as not being predictive of job performance. In particular, Zschirnt and Ruedin (2016) raise the question of whether employers draw,

> On stereotypes, hearsay, or previous experience with a small number of group members, the employer discounts the applicant because of his or her ethnicity – ethnicity acts as a proxy for unobserved information. With more information, the employer would not discriminate against the minority candidate. (pp. 3-4)

This then highlights the problematic nature of relying on SMOS.

Attraction Selection Attrition Theory

Attraction selection attrition theory (Link & Jeske, 2017) is reflected in many organizations through their attempts to attract good candidates, nurture interpersonal and organizational growth, and retain employees. This theory highlights how organizations are able to maintain their culture over time by attracting and selecting employees who fit the organization and through the attrition (voluntary resignation, or terminations over performance or other reasons) of those who do not fit. Attraction selection attrition can, however, be based upon discriminatory preferences of the organization (e.g., a male-dominated culture) (Link & Jeske, 2017; Schneider et al., 1995). The attraction process begins as the candidate is attracted to an organization based on characteristics from initial contact through personal interest (e.g., hearing about a company or seeing the company's brand) or some form of recruitment (e.g., job fair or job announcement). There is a level of interest between the candidate and the employer where shared values and beliefs are essential to interest at the beginning of this relationship.

The selection process is twofold. Part one occurs when the applicant is chosen and ultimately offered employment to join the organization (Link & Jeske, 2017; Schneider, 1987). Part two is inclusive of both the employee and the employer deciding whether this is a good person-job fit. There is also an ongoing evaluation between the hire and the organization of person-organization fit which is inclusive of perceptions of work ethic, ability to complete assignments, and the ability to get along with team members. This process is a continuous assessment which can alter how the new hire engages with the organization and vice versa. The results of a person–organization fit can either increase satisfaction and commitment from the new hire and organization or result in dissatisfaction from one or both parties.

Attrition relates to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of either an employer or employee due to poor person-organization or person-job fit (Link & Jeske, 2017). Typically, the dissatisfaction may come from unmet expectations, a lack of skill, lack of fit with the organizational culture, or the inability to perform within the team. While there are many reasons that employees may leave, ASA considers the ultimate dissatisfaction and mismatch between what employers want and what the employee can do as the main reason for employment termination (Link & Jeske, 2017; Schneider, 1987; Schneider et al., 1995).

Organizations tend to reinforce their own cultures through attracting, selecting, promoting, and retaining the employees that best fit the culture. However, this can include discriminatory motives, whether conscious or unconscious. SMOS might be used as a tool within the process to discriminate against minorities or others who are "not like us" where stereotypes about candidates activate biases.

Theory of Reasoned Action

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) identifies relationships between attitudes and behaviors (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Used to predict and understand behavior and the outcomes of the behavior, this theory seeks to identify and predict individual motivating factors, attitudes, and the intent of performing a specific behavior. TRA examines the concept that attitude is based on positive or negative feelings about implementing a behavior; the subjective norm is based on what others think about the behavior; [behavioral] intention is determined by the likeliness of carrying out the behavior; and the behavior defined by action, target, context, and time. The basis of this study assumes that people behave rationally not spontaneously (e.g., outbursts, rash decisions) as well as discerns between attitudes towards an object (e.g., bias) versus attitude towards a behavior (e.g., hiring the best candidate possible) which causes the

outcome. Figure 4 shows, that attitude towards the behavior and subjective norm are equally important for behavioral influence. It is then the intention (I want to; I intend to; I plan to) that becomes the influencer of the behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1988; Zint, 2002). Simply stated, the more favorable the attitude towards doing something, and subjective norm of what others think about performing the behavior, the greater the perceived behavioral intention that the person is more likely to perform the behavior.

Theory of Reasoned Action Model

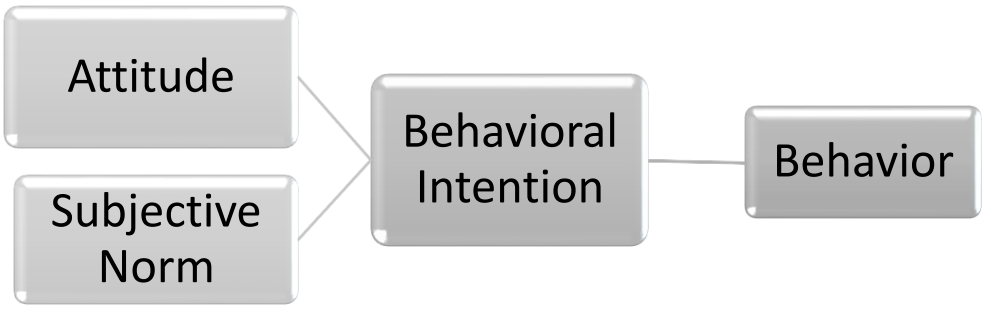

Figure 4. Theory of Reasoned Action (Adapted from Zint, 2002)

This theory is essential to this research because it contends that behavior towards or against others can both, directly and indirectly, be influenced by outside forces (subjective norms) potentially causing a change in behavior based on attitudes (biases) that surround the behavior. As an example, the organizational culture and views about gender roles might influence a manager's behavioral intention to hire a woman for a traditionally male role. Similarly, the manager's own attitudes to women might influence them. According to Pager and Quillian (2005) who have researched racial attitudes, discrimination, and inequality in the workplace against stigmatized groups,

> Literature in psychology has documented the existence and influence of implicit attitudes toward stigmatized groups that may influence judgments and actions without conscious awareness. (p. 359)

Studies show that attitudes are both varied and unpredictable. Moreover, attitudes towards or against others can lead to behaviors with intentions that can be based on a feeling, abstract statements like, ("I don't like members of group X") or concrete statements (e.g., "I will not employ members of group X") (Pager & Quillian, 2005). These decisions can loosely be based on information found about the subject (in this case candidates) through an SMOS.

Attribution Theory

The Attribution Theory, according to Heider (1958) looked to understand how "a person reacts to what he thinks the other person is perceiving, feeling, and thinking, in addition to what the other person may be doing" (p. 1). Heider's theory provided that people produce attributions (beliefs) about the causes of a person's behaviors based on two sources: (1) internal factors (personality, attitude, or abilities), and (2) external factors (things happen due to luck or other people). That is, the attribution theory is the process of using information to make various inferences about the behaviors of other people based on things they cannot control or things that are influenced by other causes. The importance of this theory is the judgments and assumptions that are made based on another's actions. According to Chan, McMahon, Cheing, Rosenthal, and Bezyak (2005), who studied attribution against persons with disabilities, concluded that negative attitudes could produce negative behaviors in the workplace based on,

> Sociocultural conditioning, belief in disability as retribution for evil, capacity of disability to evoke anxiety among observers, perceived threats to the integrity of body image, similarities to minority group animus, prejudice inviting behavior, and the influence of disability-related factors such as severity and type of impairment. (p. 78)

Another study by Knouse (1989) noted that non-verbal communication of an applicant (which can be viewed through images on SM) could, "significantly influence interviewers

ratings of internal traits and their subsequent selection decisions… leading researchers to believe that the interview serves to confirm initial impressions" (p. 187). Many times, SM serves as the channel for prospective employers to view profiles, and make decisions based on the belief that a candidate will fit (or not) the organization based on images that show race, gender, or disability status.

Summary

In summary, this study gathered data to expand the literature regarding biases that occur when recruiters utilize SMOS for cyber-vetting. Also, this chapter looked at the different meanings of reference checks (cyber and standard), possible biases that can be triggered by images on personal pages and emails, as well as legal issues that can occur due to cyber-vetting, and the decisions not to offer employment. In addition, theories explaining why hiring professionals might use information from SMOS in biased ways was reviewed. Chapter 3 will review the methods and participants of the study to gain further knowledge of biases that occur when cyber-vetting.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter discussed a paradigm shift for hiring professionals conducting standard reference checks with former employees who can now use SMOSs to cyber-vet candidates. The literature submits that due to advances in information and communication technologies, and the ease of mobile access to sites and applications by users for posting and vetting, biases may be elicited when hiring professionals are presented with the opportunity to use SMOSs to cyber-vet candidates before interviewing or hiring.

Discrimination and biases seem likely to be present as recruiters perform cyber-vetting rituals. Regardless if the bias is explicit or implicit, research shows that attitudes that are shaped outside of the conscious mind can affect the outcome of the interaction between an employer and prospective employee (Darolia et al., 2014; Derous et al., 2017a; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). This study examines the view that images, videos, comments, wording, or social connections found on SMOS are likely to trigger hiring professionals' biases leading to hiring discrimination when using SMOS as a means to conduct cyber-vetting. Further information is needed on how and when this occurs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to research how hiring professionals' use SMOS during hiring processes and how biases may be activated against minority candidates during this process. This qualitative study examines how biases might be applied when SMOS are used to view information posted on popular sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook to vet candidates before interviewing or offering a position of employment that may include cyber-vetting or standard reference checks with former employees. This study also examines how and when biases may be enacted when managers or search committee members look-up a candidate

through a SMOS out of curiosity in a more informal or unofficial way, still influencing their views of the candidate.

Research Question

How do hiring professionals apply biases to minority candidates when conducting social media and online searches (SMOS) during the cyber-vetting of applicants?

Research Design

This study used a qualitative design to describe and explain how the use of SMOS by hiring professionals elicits biases when cyber-vetting is utilized as a means of learning more about a possible candidate. According to Patton (2015), "Qualitative analysis involves interpreting interviews, observations, and documents - the data of qualitative inquiry - to find substantively meaningful patterns and themes" (p. 5). The phenomenological analysis provides a rich understanding of an event or series of events experienced by several people (Creswell, 2013). This type of analysis can offer a unique look at how people make meaning of life experiences (Creswell, 2013; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) which brings depth to the research project.

Dukes (1984) argues that the task of the phenomenologist is to "Understand, rather than to explain a human phenomenon in terms of causal antecedents or to correlate it with other human or nonhuman phenomena" (p. 198). With this notion, this qualitative study will seek to draw on the individual experiences of hiring professionals, collected through interviews, to understand hiring professionals' behavior and thoughts when vetting, including how bias is experienced or enacted when images, comments, or other information is viewed during formal or informal vetting using SMOS. The analysis was applied by choosing participants that have experienced the same phenomenon in question. As such, this study applies a constructivist

worldview which seeks to understand how people create knowledge of the world by experiencing and reflecting on personal and professional experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, the researcher aimed to gain a better understanding of the phenomena of cyber-vetting and the role of bias in cyber-vetting.

In order to gather a detailed understanding of the biases that may occur during the use of SMOS, this study used interviews as the strategy of inquiry and data collection method; more specifically, generic qualitative interviews were used to collect data about the participants' views and experiences. This method was chosen due to its effectiveness in capturing people's "attitudes, opinions, or beliefs about a particular issue" (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015, p. 76). The benefit of this approach is to look at what types of experiences hiring managers had after the fact rather than looking at the experience as it is happening, allowing a broader view of phenomena. Patton (2015) describes that the generic approach to qualitative interviewing as less in-depth than traditional phenomenological interviewing, where the researcher spends many hours interviewing fewer participants in greater depth about their history and context. In the present study, the traditional phenomenology approach would not be practical given the demands on the hiring professionals' time. Shorter interviews with more participants allowed the researcher to gain insights from a larger and more heterogeneous sample.

Population and Sample

A purposive sample of 15 hiring professionals was recruited for this study from the population of managers, human resource personnel, recruiters, and any other representatives that participate in the cyber-vetting and hiring decisions. Purposeful sampling gave the researcher rich information about the research problem by seeking out people who have specific expertise or experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). This

study used a non-representative sample of the population, as the focus of the study is more on understanding the phenomenon than generalizing the results of this study to a larger population. A sample size of fifteen participants is supported in Daniel's (2012) and Creswell and Creswell's (2018) recommendations for this type of study.

The 15 participants worked in human resources or had some direct role in the hiring process for a minimum of two years. The hiring professionals that were recruited by the researcher came from various organizations allowing for a range of experiences and perspectives in the data. Participants were from various states and industries, and work for large and small organizations inclusive of for-profit and non-profit organizations. The industries represented in this research study are in the areas of sports; professional services; telecommunication; gas and oil; technology; food services; marketing; research and development; and non-profit. Participants were identified through the researcher's personal and professional contacts. Participants were also recruited through snowball sampling where initial participants referred the researcher to colleagues who could also participate in the study (Creswell, 2013; Snow, Hutcheson, & Prather, 1981).

Field Testing

The goal of a field or pilot test is to help the researcher examine how interview questions may be perceived by participants. According to Creswell (2013), states that a pilot study is used to "refine data collection plans and develop relevant lines of questions" (165). A successful field or pilot test can inform the researcher if questions are easy to understand, and if they allow for a rich understanding of experiences from participants as related to the phenomenon of hiring biases. The field testing of the interview consisted of five participants who are hiring managers in mid-sized organizations. The participants were not used for the final study. They were asked

to provide detailed feedback on the questions on whether they were easy to understand and if the questions were related to the purpose of the research. The field test confirmed that the interview protocol was ready for use.

Data Collection

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), (see Appendix D) an introductory email was sent to all participants either as a first contact or after initial verbal contact (see Appendix B). Recruitment continued until 15 participants committed to an interview. Once a commitment to participate was made, a written consent form was sent to the potential participant via email (Appendix C), along with a request for a mutually agreed date, time, and location (or video conference request) for the interview. The consent forms were received before the interview either in person or through email or fax.

The qualitative data for this study was collected using face-to-face interviews and online interviews. After participant permission, face-to-face interviews were recorded using a hand-held recorder to store the data. With additional participant permission, a secondary audio recorder was used for backup. For online interviews, the researcher employed Skype or Zoom to facilitate and record interviews of those that were unable to meet face-to-face. Research participants received a thank you card for participating.

All field notes and recordings were clearly and adequately labeled and were kept in a private and secure folder on the researcher's laptop in order to decrease the likelihood of confusion and mistakes in data usage. After all interviews were completed, recordings were transcribed omitting any participant or organization identifying information, replacing them with pseudonyms, to ensure confidentiality. Each transcript was verified for accuracy by the

researcher against the audio recordings. Preventative measures were taken to protect the data to avoid information corruption, loss, and unauthorized access.

Instrumentation

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The researcher had face-to-face in-person interviews or used an online video conference to facilitate and record interviews of those that were unable to meet face-to-face (e.g., Zoom). This study used open-ended interview questions in order to gain the research participants' experiences with the phenomenon under investigation. The use of a qualitative interview design allowed reconstruction of the experiences and events of participants' lives (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Each one-on-one interview was allotted one hour. A total of 14 questions and possible follow-up questions were asked during the interviews (Appendix A).

The questions for the interviews were developed to gain a rich understanding of how managers and hiring professionals use SMOS to cyber-vet candidates, and what, if any, biases are engaged during hiring decisions. Three central background questions were used to assess the participant's demographics inclusive of professional background experience in the hiring process and their role in recruiting, selection, hiring, and cyber-vetting candidates. The remainder of the questions were open-ended and focused on the participants' experiences, values, feelings, and thoughts related to cyber-vetting, selection, and the use of SMOS during the selection process. Probing questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) were used to explore participants' answers when their initial response lacks clarity or detail.

Data Analysis

The following process was adapted from Creswell and Creswell (2018) to describe the data analysis process.

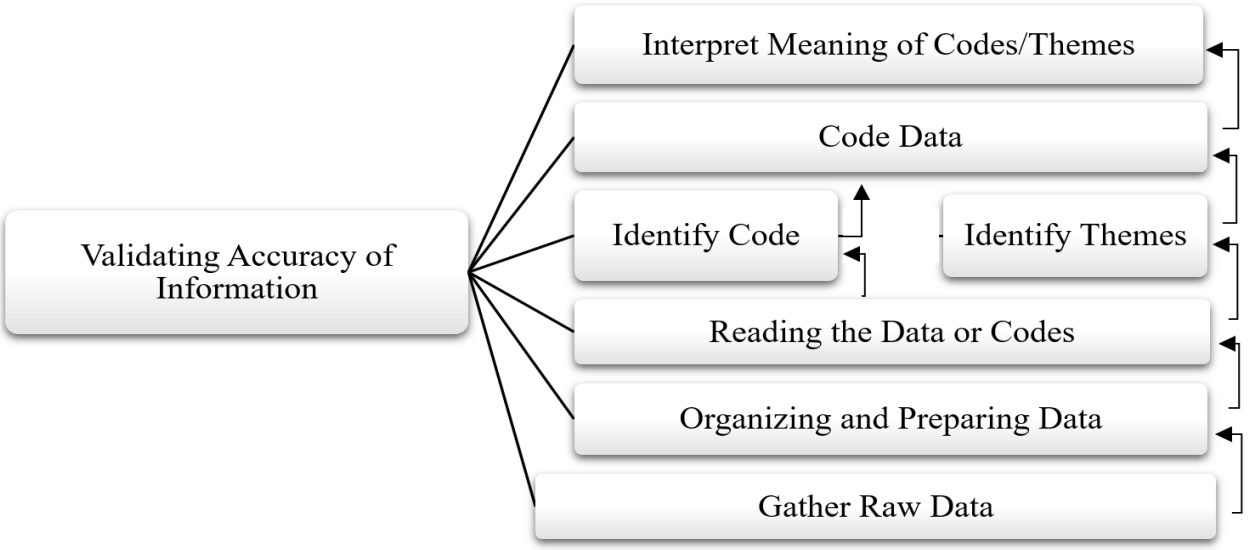

Figure 5. Data Analysis Process (Adapted from Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 194)

The first step of the data analysis as described by Creswell and Creswell (2018) is to organize and prepare the raw data. This entails transcribing interviews, scanning through the material for necessary formatting changes, removing identifying information, gathering and typing field notes, and sorting and cataloging material according to sources and types of information. The second step involves reading all the data to gain a complete understanding of the information. The third step is to begin to code the data by identifying common chunks of meaning. For example, where participants refer to prevailing ideas, experiences, thoughts, feelings, or approaches. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), "Coding is the process of organizing the data by bracketing and writing a word to represent the data in the margin" (p. 194). This step results in a list of codes which will be refined to ensure the codes succinctly address the scope of the data and organize it in a way that addresses the research question. The fourth step involves applying the codes to the data by identifying all words or phrases related to the codes and marking them up in some way. The fifth step is to describe the codes in a clear way using the meanings in the relevant quotations from the transcripts, as well as identify the

prevalence of the codes in the data (e.g., how frequently were codes mentioned in individual interviews and across the interviews). This process included reviewing the data and codes for "interconnecting themes" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 195). Reviewing the codes and data (by returning to step 3), allows the researcher to identify themes in the codes and data. Exemplary quotations are identified representing each of the codes and themes to allow the researcher to present the codes and themes with rich examples of participants' responses. The last step in this process was to record the results in Chapter 4 and interpret and discuss them in Chapter 5.

Research Quality

Internal and external validity is a concern for every committed researcher. The interview protocol (see instrumentation section and Appendix A) was developed to ensure the intentions of the study matched what was asked during interviews. In addition, a consistent approach to data collection was used in all interviews. The validity of a qualitative study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) was based on the data and findings being accurate from the point-of-view of the researcher, the participants, or the readers of the study. A way to ensure the validity of the study is to present information from the interviews that is both favorable and challenging ("discrepant information", Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 200) to the researcher's view to enhance the research. In addition, to convey rich and thick descriptions of the actual interviews, the researcher used quotes from interviews to add to the authenticity and validity of the findings.

To ensure reliability of the study's findings, transcripts were reviewed for accuracy. In addition, an independent researcher reviewed the coding of the data to ensure a reliable approach to analyzing and reporting the data. The researcher took caution to ensure that the definition and meaning of codes remained unchanged or modified (code drift) by comparing data with codes

and definitions throughout the data analysis process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher was also careful to document all data collection and analysis procedures in this document and followed these procedures to ensure a transparent, reproducible, and consistent approach to the research.

The researcher has personal bias due to her Black heritage, and firsthand knowledge of discrimination and racism in the workplace, not only as a person of color but as a woman. Reflexivity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), however, is a core characteristic of solid qualitative research. By sharing the perspective and biases of the researcher with the reader, it allows for maximum objectivity to ensure the researcher and the reader are aware of the views discussed and researched in this study; and the personal biases are bracketed prior to collecting and analyzing the data, in an attempt to reduce their impact on the findings and conclusions of the study. While the researcher's thoughts may be shaped by firsthand experiences and biases, sharing research findings that are both positive and negative with the reader, as well as the actual words of participants through quotations, encourages objectivity in the study.

Summary

The methodology used was a qualitative design to describe and explain how SMOS elicits biases when cyber-vetting is used as a means of learning more about a possible candidate. All participants were purposefully selected based on their professional background and experience in cyber-vetting, hiring, and selection processes. Interviews will be utilized to gather data that addresses the research questions of this study. The results of the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. Next, the data was analyzed using a series of steps adapted from Creswell and Creswell (2018). Adhering to the process and the steps outlined above

supports the reliability and validity of the study and ensure the study can be replicated. The next chapter will focus on the details of the findings.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the data analysis of the interviews conducted for this study. This chapter is organized into five sections: a review of the purpose of the study, the research question, a summary of the methodology used for this study, the background of the participants, analysis of the data through participants' sensemaking about SMOS use during cyber-vetting, and themes derived from secondary analysis of the initial codes and data.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify how hiring professionals' use SMOS during hiring processes and how biases may be activated against minority candidates during this process. This qualitative study examined how biases might be applied when SMOS are used to view job candidates' personal and professional information posted on popular sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook to vet candidates before interviewing them or offering them a position of employment. This study also examined how and when biases may be enacted when managers or search committee members look-up a candidate through a SMOS out of curiosity in a more informal or unofficial way, still influencing their views of the candidate.

Research Question

This study addressed the central research question: How do hiring professionals apply biases to minority candidates when conducting SMOS during the cyber-vetting of applicants?

Methodology Summary

This study used a qualitative design to describe and explain how the use of SMOS by hiring professionals elicits biases when cyber-vetting is utilized as a means of learning more about a possible candidate. Participants were identified through the researcher's professional contacts as well as snowball sampling. Fifteen participants were recruited and interviewed

between June and August 2018, with each interview lasting approximately 40-80 minutes. Data was collected using open-ended interview questions in a semi-structured interview format. Transcripts of interview audio-recordings were systematically analyzed for patterns, categories, and themes in Dedoose (qualitative data analysis software). Eleven interviews were face-to-face and four were conducted over the phone.

Participants

Five questions were devoted to demographics, each with probing questions as needed. Table 1 shows the demographics of each participant and addresses the participant's role in the organization, size of organization (number of employees), company culture, location (urban, rural, local, international), and race. All 15 participants have worked in human resources or had some direct role in the hiring process for a minimum of two years. The participants have experience with using popular SMOS to research potential candidates before a hiring interview, or before making a job offer. The hiring professionals that were recruited for this study were from various organizations allowing a range of experiences and perspectives to be included in the data. Participants were also from various states and industries and worked for large and small organizations inclusive of for-profit and non-profit organizations. Of the 15 participants, 66.7% (n = 10) were male, and 33.3% (n = 5) were female. Fifty-three percent were white, 40% were Black, and 6% were Asian.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participants	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Total
Hiring Role																
HR	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	13
Vice President								X								1
Coach												X				1
Number of Employees																

0-50		X						X				X				3
51-200				X		X				X				X		4
201-500	X										X					2
501-1000					X											1
1001-25K																0
26K-50K			X										X			2
Over 50K							X		X						X	3
Company Culture																
Conservative/ Traditional		X	X	X	X	X			X	X			X			8
Innovative/ Progressive	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	14
Business Location																
Urban	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X		X	11
Rural	X		X	X	X		X		X				X	X	X	9
Local			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	12
International				X		X	X	X	X							5
Race of Participant																
White		X	X	X		X		X		X			X	X		8
Black	X				X		X				X	X			X	6
Asian									X							1

Note: Company culture: Conservative and traditional organizations have traditional values and are averse to changes choosing to do work the same way it always has been done. Innovative and progressive businesses introduce new or different practices with the goal of working towards the future and as a guide to creating business.

The median length of experience in HR was 10 years. The most experienced individual had over 20 years of experience in HR, while the least experienced participant only had two years of experience. Of the 15 participants, 13 worked in human resources functions in charge of hiring, one individual was a college basketball coach responsible for cyber-vetting as part of both the athlete and employee recruitment processes, and one was the vice president of an organization that oversaw hiring and the cyber-vetting process. In Table 1, the company sizes are broken down in terms of number of employees. The breakdown shows that seven of the participants came from small organizations with an employee base of under 200, three

participants were categorized as mid-sized organizations with employee size from 201-500, and the remaining five participants came from large organizations with an employee base of over 500.

When examining the corporate culture to categorize participants' organizations as conservative-traditional, and innovate-progressive, many of the participants placed their organization in multiple categories or moving from one to another. In addition, many of the organizations cross the boundaries of where they do business, be it urban, rural, local, or international. Only 26% (n = 4) of the participants worked for organizations with one location while the rest 73% (n = 11) had multiple locations or offices.

Findings

The qualitative data analysis process applied in this study was patterned after Creswell and Creswell's (2018) recommended approach. The first step was to organize and prepare the raw data. This entailed transcribing interviews, uploading transcriptions into Dedoose, and reviewing material for necessary formatting changes, removing identifying information, gathering and typing field notes, and sorting and cataloging material according to sources and types of information. The second step involved reading all the data to gain a complete understanding of the information. During this process, the researcher examined the general ideas that the participants were expressing and made notes in Dedoose about salient comments and points (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the third step, the data was coded by identifying common chunks of meaning. For example, where participants refer to prevailing ideas, experiences, thoughts, feelings, or approaches. As these codes began to emerge, the researcher grouped commonalities and used a single word or two to define or represent the category. This step resulted in a list of codes which were refined to ensure the codes succinctly address the

scope of the data and was organized in a way that addressed the research question. The fourth step involved applying the codes to the set of transcripts by identifying all words or phrases related to the codes and linking them in Dedoose to the codes, allowing counts to be generated of the frequencies of the various codes. The fifth step was to describe the codes in a clear way using the meanings in the relevant quotations from the transcripts, as well as identify the prevalence of the codes in the data (e.g., how frequently were codes mentioned in individual interviews and across the interviews). Next, the data and codes were reviewed for "interconnecting themes" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 195). Exemplary quotations were identified representing each of the codes and themes to allow the researcher to present the codes and themes with rich examples of participants' responses.

Participants Understanding of Cyber-vetting

Participants were asked about their understanding and use of cyber-vetting when looking to hire and performing background checks. This question aimed to assess participants' understanding of cyber-vetting as a tool (using SMOS to view personal pages on Facebook, Instagram, or any other SM platforms or online, public sources of information). Each participant displayed an acute awareness of what cyber-vetting was and the websites that could be used to vet a candidate. Participants also displayed the ability to fully and clearly vocalize the many different sites that were used beyond what the researcher mentioned in the opening of the interview, as well as how other individuals the participants had observed use SMOS to vet candidates. All participants used SM as a tool in some manner to cyber-vet candidates either prior to an interview or before hiring. LinkedIn was used by 13 participants in primary SMOS, with Facebook being used as a secondary SMOS source by 12 of the participants. The two participants that did not use LinkedIn relied on Facebook as a primary source for cyber-vetting.

Participants freely answered questions regarding their understanding of cyber-vetting, and the processes used when reviewing candidates either prior to or before hiring. Participant 12 stated that his first steps are to,

> Find social media pages, add them (candidates) to our social media pages where we are able to see their page, and then we do a deep scrub going back to the beginning looking at pictures, looking at comments, looking at quotes, to see if there are any red flags first off, and second off to see if there is anything we need to be concerned about.

When Participant 14 was asked the same question of her understanding and use of SM to cyber-vet, she stated that in her line of work she vets so that, "If I see pictures that are questionable habits or ethics, I can ask them about that." Participant 15 noted that "Every recruiter has an opportunity to cyber-vet." He continued by acknowledging that he looks to SM during the cyber-vetting process for "How the person brands themselves or presents themselves; that's what we look for the most." Participant 11 noted that in his process, "I look at their résumés, typically I'll go on Facebook and look them up, to see what type of image that they give to the world." Although it was evident that the way participants looked at the information was influenced by the nature of the position. For example, if the position required networking skills, then examining the strength of the candidate's network was considered. In statements such as these, participants were aware and fully acknowledged the use of SMOS to do a comprehensive search for a potential hire.

Categories

An analysis of the participants' interviews presented themes that were critical to their experiences with using cyber-vetting and how biases may be formed and applied to minorities prior to an interview or a job offer. Forty-nine preliminary categories or codes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) were identified. While many of the preliminary categories were not directly related to the research question, there were commonalities found among participants' responses

either in personal experiences when cyber-vetting, or in examples shared of other hiring professional's practices that participants had observed.

All 49 categories were reviewed, and from that, seven major categories were identified, after which subcategories and major categories were identified from the initial codes. The major categories were: SM use; criteria being examined using SM; SM red flags; biases elicited due to SM use; awareness and management of biases; observable characteristics on SM; and the influence of national politics on biases. Where needed, some subcategories were further broken down into narrow categories representing unique concepts within the subcategory. The full list of categories is provided in Table 2, along with how frequently each category came up across all interviews. Expanded descriptions are provided for categories when frequencies were mentioned 10 or more times. While categories labeled, "other" were descriptions mentioned by one participant.

Table 2

Code Categories and Frequencies

Major category	Subcategory	Frequency
SM use		
	LinkedIn	**23**
	Facebook	**17**
	Other SM sites used	11
	Reaching candidates without SM	**11**
Criteria being examined using SM		
	Pictures, physical features, and bios	**34**
	Organizational fit	**26**
	- Qualification for the job	**29**
	- Analysis of LinkedIn contacts	5
	- Hires people like them	5
	- Positive representation of organization	4
	Cultural fit	**22**
	Other criteria being examined	13
SM red flags		
	Views on national politics	**19**
	Race (color of skin)	**18**

	Negative attitudes (life, job, others)	**14**
	- Negative posts about employer	4
	- Wearing company attire behaving negatively	1
	Online persona vs reality	**10**
	Drugs or alcohol use	9
	Abuse of others or obvious crimes	8
	Name bias (ethnic sounding names)	6
	Religious beliefs	6
	Confederate flags on page	5
	Use of explicit language	5
	Extreme views	7
	Gang affiliation	4
	Job-hoppers	2
	Self-aggrandizement	2
	Visible weapons	2
	Other red flags	8
Biases elicited by SM use		
	Racism	7
	Lack of diversity	7
	Assumptions	2
Awareness and management of biases	**Self-awareness of personal biases**	**59**
	Aware of colleague's biases	**31**
	Are others aware of their biases	**27**
	Diversity and inclusion methods	**27**
	Giving perspective and advice	**26**
	Intuition instinct and subjectivity	**20**
	Digs deeper to find information	**18**
	Standardized approach to cyber-vetting	**14**
Observable characteristics on SM		
	Blacks, skin color, race	**45**
	Women and gender	**11**
	Older candidates	9
	Other visual differences	4
	LGBT	3
	Other observable characteristics	3
Outside influences on decision making		
	- Influence of national politics on biases	**12**
	- Influences from other sources	**11**

Note: Frequencies here represent the overall number of times the category emerged across all interviews, including counts for the issue appearing multiple times in a single interview

Social Media Use

SM was a main category where the SMOS platforms used by participants to cyber-vet candidates were identified. All fifteen participants (100%) noted the use of SM to be both

relevant and essential in the cyber-vetting of candidates. Initially, one candidate indicated that his company did not use SM, however, concluded that several individuals in his previous organization cyber-vetted. Seven (46%) felt that it was helpful to not only use SMOS to examine candidate's employment history, lifestyles, and business and personal connections, but also to look for any other information on SMOS that could be deemed as significant in making a hiring decision (e.g., general behavior on SM). Eight (53%) of the participants claimed not to utilize SM in a formal capacity to vet candidates or make decisions; however, the researcher found inconsistencies and contradictions in some interviews that could suggest some hiring decisions could be made or influenced by informal peeks at a candidate's profile page. One example of this was Participant 9 who when asked about SM use to cyber-vet first stated:

> We don't use any social media to vet candidates, and if it were to be found out that we did use social media to pick people based on the color of their skin versus the qualifications, I would hope it would be addressed.

However, when asked about the aspects of social-media and cyber-vetting later in the interview said,

> [We look for] things that shouldn't be on a professional site, maybe on Facebook. Those are things we look at when we do search on a social media presence. Unfortunately, some people don't lock their Facebook, so there have been instances where we look to see, 'oh I'm meeting so-and-so tomorrow, what do they look like?' Just to make sure that we connect, and sometimes we see just very inappropriate pictures. (Participant 9)

All of the hiring professionals that participated in this study agreed that their establishments used SM, either formally or informally, as a way to cyber-vet applicants. This was seen as an opportunity to assess fit with both the organization and culture through looking at images and posts on SM platforms. A study by Kluemper and Rosen (2009) supports the notion that employers that use SM platforms to assess personality are able to predict high and low performers based on images identified on SM networking sites. As an example, participant 15 stated,

> [On social media], I'm looking to see how the person brands themselves. I'm looking at profiles to see if I think the person will fit our company. We see these things many times on a person's résumé or on a profile page, but when you look the person up in one setting or in one social site and then you come across that person on another social media site or in a social outlet, if it's different, that may cause pause or delay or it may even turn you completely off.

Participants reported the most common SM platforms used to cyber-vet are LinkedIn and Facebook. Other sites not as commonly used were Instagram, Twitter, and Google Search (engine).

LinkedIn. The most frequently searched SM site was LinkedIn, as 13 participants (87%) indicated the use of this platform both formally and informally. The interviews suggested that participants utilized the LinkedIn platform as a business resource to determine certain aspects of candidate viability from a business point-of-view. Of the 13 participants that use LinkedIn as a platform to cyber-vet, 11 (85%) stated that they put great importance on making sure that candidates résumé matched what was on their LinkedIn page. In other words, they examined if candidates were truthful on their résumé and not inflating what they had done in previous jobs. The following quotes illustrate this sub-category:

> Using LinkedIn for us is validation. Is this the person that they say they are? If not, let's dive into that with some maybe follow-up interviews or bring up some questions that we have concerns about. (Participant 7)

> My primary goal is just to kind of validate that their résumé and what they post about themselves online kind of matches. I think my assumption is that an online presence like LinkedIn is going to be more accurate to the life, where a résumé or a cover letter that they are sending or directing to a specific company, they might fluff it up or exaggerate a bit. (Participant 13)

> I would then look at what [they] have out there on LinkedIn at least, after the interview. Try to match what they tell me with what they have out there. And if it seems to be highly inflated, then that presents a problem. If they tell me one thing in the résumé for something else, if their online profile is something else, that speaks volumes. If they're gonna lie to me, or on LinkedIn, that speaks volumes in my opinion. (Participant 4)

Facebook. Facebook is a site that individuals use on a casual basis for communication and sharing pictures and updates with friends and family. For some, it provides a way of creating an alternate persona, somewhat different than what people may see face-to-face (e.g., the persona of pop-star using Facebook to communicate with fans). These styles of posting to Facebook can at times hurt a candidate especially when hiring professionals look at Facebook for verification of character and potential red flags that may be brought into question. The following participant's excerpts give examples of how they use Facebook as a cyber-vetting tool:

> My boss told me to do it. She was very ... she's great, she's a good friend of mine, but she's very nosy in a way. And she wanted to see what these people were doing outside of work. (Participant 4)

> After I look at their résumés, typically I'll go on Facebook and look them up, to see what type of image that they give to the world. (Participant 11)

> Even with Facebook, I'm just trying to learn more about the person. (Participant 10)

> I never used it unless it was alerted to me that a particular person may have had a picture or a comment on their Facebook and it was brought to me. (Participant 5)

Interestingly, the final comment confirms that informal assessments by other individuals in the organization might influence the HR managers' review of SM, reinforcing that it is not just formal searches that impact the hiring process. Therefore, SM was used: to verify a résumé, to see what a person looks like prior to an interview, for informal assessments that sometimes come from others (comments on a page), for attempts to identify inappropriate information, and to get a personal look at the candidate and his or her life.

Other sites used. In addition to engaging LinkedIn and Facebook to cyber-vet, all participants were aware of other platforms that could be used to cyber-vet candidates. However, only five of the 15 (33%) said they looked at Instagram or other sites that would allow a personal look into a candidate through their online presence. For the candidates that used other sources,

the decision was based on the fact that Instagram provides pictures that could be uploaded from a smartphone and shed light on the candidate's life, and Twitter use provides posts with limited content but still provides insight to behavior patterns. While some participants used these sites, the majority of participants felt it was not worth the time to cyber-vet on those sites. Other sites mentioned infrequently were Google search, Myspace, and the dark web.

Other ways to reach candidates. The present study discusses the importance of cyber-vetting as a way of examining potential hires. However, although SMOS is a popular way to vet candidates, it is not the only way used by hiring managers. For five of the participants, they mentioned making a choice not to use SMOS, including revisiting résumés for clarification rather than checking SM. Participant 4 stated, "(I like to) give people the benefit of the doubt if possible, so if I had a good experience with that individual, I'd run with that."

Criteria Being Examined Using Social Media

All 15 (100%) participants felt that either they or other hiring managers were reviewing material over SM in order to make decisions based on possible employee compatibility. That is, assumptions were established because of an image or information found on a profile page on how a candidate may (or may not) fit the company culture. Participant 15 illustrated clearly that,

> In talent acquisition, we found that many individuals are looking to hire themselves, like clones of themselves. As a recruiter, I may feel that the person that fits the position is the person that sounds like me, or looks like me, or has the same type of personality. (Participant 15)

Statements like this is not only an awareness of bias, but it comes down to fit; specifically, *how* the candidate may fit the organization and culturally with other employees.

Pictures, physical features, and bios. Overwhelmingly, all 15 participants believed that pictures were viewed as the most significant area to give hiring managers the opportunity see what the candidate looks like, providing an opportunity for biases to take shape based on what

they (the hiring manager) may see. The categorization of pictures on a SM site resulted in similar responses from all participants leading to the possibility of judgement of the candidate occurring prior to an interview or a job offer. The following excerpts support this finding:

> Pictures say 1000 words, so they're very effective. You can sometimes say what you want to say, but a lot of times you post a picture and there might be something in the background of the picture that catches your eye. Something on a table that sitting in front of you while you're taking a picture that catches your eye. So, pictures are very important, very telling. (Participant 12)

> If you're looking for certain type of person for your organization and it's all based on looks, if that's your goal, it would exclude people and they may never know that they had a shot. They may look at Facebook and just say, 'nope, you're out.' (Participant 10)

> I would have a phone interview to see if what the personality of the picture matched the personality of the person on the phone, because people can do very inappropriate things, but not be like that in a professional setting. (Participant 3)

> Social media can work against people of color (points to his skin) the most, people with disabilities, and then people that are older. (Participant 1)

> When you see a picture, I think it's that unconscious bias that people start to be like, "oh this guy doesn't look like he's a professional, he's got long hair and dreadlocks, or this person died their hair red, or he looks old or too young." Unfortunately, pictures of people start to make you have some reaction that you probably don't intentionally want to have it's just our nature. (Participant 13)

The event of seeing a candidate's picture on SM due to an online search had an effect on all participants, which led them to make assertions about the possibilities of other hiring professionals that choose to look at SM as a cyber-vetting tool, resulting in assumptions made based on photographs or posts. Pictures (innocent or not) could be a determining factor in a candidate getting a job or being offered an interview if the person cyber-vetting has a bias (implicit or explicit) to the material that is being viewed online.

Cultural fit. All 15 participants were concerned with a new hire and compatibility with other employees in the company. However, eighty percent of participants felt that cultural fit

was important prior to hiring, and again, SMOS provided information on what a candidate could be like if hired. Participant 14 recalls,

> I have worked for other managers, if somebody came through the door and they were not the right color, they weren't the right age, they weren't the right sex, take the résumé if they gave them an interview, it was a joke, and most of the times, that résumé ended up in the garbage, because they didn't fit.

Participant 1 echoed that statement by asserting,

> I think just speaking in general, if I am a white male, and I go to your Facebook page, and your name is Paul Smith which seems like a white guy's name, and I'm like "yes!" Then I see your picture, and I'm like, "maybe we don't have as much in common as I think." I think that that sort of unconscious bias is a killer.

This was the general consensus of the majority of participants, with Participant 10 also adding, "We're trying to build a team, and I don't want to bring people in that are not gonna fit with the personalities of the rest of the team, because it's just a waste of time and money." Participants overall felt that it was important to use SM sites like Facebook to observe everyday life or the perception that the candidate chooses to share. By examining, insight can be gained to the type of behaviors that could be expected if hired.

Organizational fit. Organizational fit proved to be necessary for 12 out of the 15 participants (80%). When assessing if the candidate will be a good fit for the company, recruiters are looking at the values, characteristics of the candidate and comparing them to that of the organization. Participant 6 stated that,

> We try to get as much detail upfront as far as what the hiring manager is looking for because it saves us time in the end. The more accurate of a person we can deliver for an applicant, the easier it is on them and us, and it saves money and time.

Participant 9 added, "We base our assessment off of how an external candidate would fit within our values." Organizational fit for some of the participants went hand-in-hand with the candidate having the skills to match the job. In some instances, creating a checklist allowed the

hiring professional to compare skills from a site like LinkedIn, to a hard copy résumé in an attempt to find the perfect hire for the company.

Qualification for the job. When speaking of being qualified for the job, eleven out of the 15 participants (73%) stated they were looking for a good fit with the organization; that is, they were looking for candidates that would be able to fill the needs of the company in terms of skills and ability to do the job efficiently.

Having the proper knowledge to complete tasks required in the position was mentioned by 27% of participants, and the issue appeared 10 times across the interviews. Participant 6, felt that,

> A good fit would be somebody who matches what the hiring manager is looking for. If their résumé (on LinkedIn or on paper) looks similar to that fake résumé we've developed, for the perfect candidate that would be a good fit" (Participant 6).

Finding the right candidate with experience in the field was important to all of the participants, as was the ability to use LinkedIn to validate résumés being equally as important. The ability to examine job experience as well as references by colleagues or former employers that validated skills and performance aided in making the connection that the candidate had viable skills to fit the needs of the job.

Other Criteria. Six of the 15 participants felt that either themselves or others are sometimes looking for a token employee (e.g., Black, woman, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT)) to fill an open position. The ability to use SMOS gives the hiring manager the opportunity to see information about the candidate in order to decide if he or she meets diversity criteria (this information is often unclear on CVs). The following excerpts support this finding:

> There are times that I feel that sometimes we as either recruiters or individuals that are hiring are looking for token. Then there are other times that they are also running away from "the token" person to fill that role. (Participant 15)

> By hiring a black person, the hiring manager can say, 'yeah we're not racist in the hiring process, we have black people who work here.' And it's just that one guy. So that's that whole 'I'm not racist, my friends are Black,' and it's like where does that come into play? It can absolutely affect someone's decision about whether to hire somebody or not. (Participant 11)

> I think in this day and age especially with big companies; I think that [skin color] can actually help candidates. That's a huge initiative for a lot of places is diversity recruiting … So here it can really help candidates here if they have the skill set, that's gonna push somebody over the edge as opposed to somebody who's a White female, or a White male. (Participant 3)

Using SMOS to hire provides an opportunity for the employer to observe what a prospective candidate looks like prior to an interview and can put the applicant at an advantage or disadvantage based solely on what is identified on SM.

Social Media Red Flags

All participants (100%) felt that while using SM as a tool to vet potential hires, red flags would halt them from either interviewing or making a job offer to an interviewee. Participant 1 felt that using SMOS as a tool was important to establish what kind of person they might be. He looks to see,

> Is their lean hurtful? Are they sort of closed off to others? Is it the kind of language that they could then come into the office and do that same thing in person? They might close themselves off from someone else because they think differently.

According to Participant 12,

> We will right away go out, find social media pages, add them to our social media page we're able to see their page and then we do a deep scrub going back to the beginning looking at pictures, looking at comments, looking at quotes, to see if there are any red flags first off, and second off to see if there is anything we need to be concerned about, if we go forward with that particular candidate.

Participant 13 was looking to see "Things that might be inappropriate in a professional environment, that would definitely be a red flag." The following subcategories give examples of red flags mentioned by participants.

National politics. Ten of the 15 participants (66.6%) mentioned that the current national political environment also had the potential of influencing bias when hiring. This could be because the hiring manager agreed or disagreed with the applicant on political issues, and how they regard other people or cultures in society. The following statements provide examples:

> If a hiring manager found [political things], maybe they agreed or disagreed with that political view [of the candidate], could they say that person is out because their political views are different. (Participant 6)

> I think especially now within our political climate when I look on social media and see that someone is a different political party than mine, I already have an unconscious bias against them, regardless if the person is very similar to the background of myself. (Participant 9)

These experiences show that political posts online can affect the possibility of job offers to applicants depending if an employer either agrees or disagrees with the candidate and their political stance.

Race. Race was considered a red flag by 60% of participants. Participant 15 responded, "As soon as I see a picture of someone, me personally, my mind starts turning. Depending on a person's nationality or race, there are times that people may start to think a certain way." He continued, "I think pictures are damaging in some aspect. They can cause individuals to think a certain way about giving us (blacks) complete opportunities to present themselves in the type of manner when it comes to career opportunities." Participant 1 added, "Social media can work against people of color (points to his skin) the most." And Participant 5 expressed,

> I'm not sure of the reasons, but I would definitely say that blacks don't get treated in the same way. They get passed over because typically African-Americans have certain features that people don't necessarily feel they connect with.

However, blacks were not the only category of race that managers were thought to be biased against. Participant 13 added, "The potential for political organizations and non-US citizenship or ties with certain countries would be a red flag for my organization, unfortunately." Race was mentioned 18 times with the overall notion being that race plays a role in what can be seen on SM opening the door to possible judgmental thoughts against or for a prospective hire.

Negative attitudes or posts. Negative attitudes were another area of concern for nine of the 15 participants. Participant 14 confessed that one thing she looks for is

> If they are speaking negative of people, groups of people, or jobs that they were in, I don't want negativity in the office. I want positive progressive people that are willing to go outside of the box to do the best thing for the client.

Participant 8 shared that, he

> Thinks about if it's a person who just likes to rant and rave about negative stuff online, and the employer sees that. That might make them (the employer) not want to hire the person just because they're always negative. That's seen as a negative attitude which could lead to a bias.

Participant 10 stated that,

> Anything that could potentially be negative as a whole. There's a big difference between being very negative even about your employer or about the negative things you can post on even Glassdoor. If somebody's been negative, or there is information bashing a company, those are things that we look for. The negativity is a really big piece of it.

These candidates came to individual conclusions that negativity in posts could lead to a cancerous behavior being transferred to an organization and also other employees. SM provided a path to examine context on a webpage that would allow the hiring professional to make decisions based on what was read.

Online persona vs. reality. The final major sub-category found under SM Red Flags was online persona vs. reality, in other words, a fictitious persona that an individual wants others to see or identify with. Participant 2 stated,

> I think that today it's less regarding color or an ethnicity or a gender and more regarding the actual portrayals or self-portrayals on social media. Are they ghetto, gangster, street, or hard; or do they just want to look like it. If that's the portrayal you put up, this is a very good way to get yourself disqualified.

However, two participants looked at online personas differently, reasoning that,

> It's kind of a shame that we would have to have a society where people need to alter their online persona so that they are not biased against or people are not biased towards them. (Participant 4)

Another participant examined candidates that have a polished persona, however, read deeper on a SM page to try to find the real person. He shares his belief that,

> Facebook gives you a glimpse; probably Facebook and Twitter allow that best to happen. Because people often times post a polished version of themselves. It is a version that they want people to see, but you can also read down a little bit in their post and sort of see who is beneath the surface. Who's beneath that polished version? (Participant 1)

Online persona was a topic that had meaning for three of the 15 participants. One participant focused on a fake personality created to suit onlookers being negative in nature; a second participant focused on the fact that minorities need to create a persona just to be seen in a positive light; and the third felt that a candidate that had a polished version of themselves might be hiding something (negative) therefore, it would be worth the time and effort to do a further search of SMOSs. Statements like these led the researcher to believe that regardless of the persona that a minority candidate posts, a recruiter may attempt to discover more information that would allow the employer to exclude a potential hire based on findings.

Other SM red flags. Additional red flags were noted during participant interviews. Lesser mentioned but still noteworthy examples were alcohol and drug use shown in pictures or abuse of others. Five participants felt that ethnic sounding names opened the doors to being biased against candidates, with Participant 15 stating, "I think there are times when we see a person's name, and that name has triggered unconscious bias." Religious beliefs were a red flag to five participants when material on SM pages were perceived as overly religious. Four

participants expressed concerns about confederate flags on SM profiles, while some of the less commonly raised issues were explicit language, extreme views (political), gang affiliation, job hoppers, and boastful job-seekers. The least crucial red flag factors for the participants was an unprofessional email address, posting negative complaints about previous employers or job-related issues, and showing weapons in a profile picture or on a page.

Biases Elicited by SM Use

As the use of SM allows individuals to share information, the participants acknowledged that some items shared on SM platforms might open the door to both implicit and explicit biases. According to Participant 1,

> I would say, in the United States, culturally, it is more acceptable to be a bit more grounded in your biases and be okay to share those publicly because likely folks that are with you at your table have similar biases so it's okay to act on those.

Under the sub-categories of racism, lack of diversity, and assumptions, nine of the 15 participants (60%) had the belief that biases could be triggered with the use of SM. For example, with relation to racism, participant 7 said, "I guarantee that biases are still happening, especially biases against certain races and genders." Regarding the lack of diversity, Participant 6 stated,

> By having your picture on your résumé, or being able to see it on LinkedIn, can still become a bias. Because an employer can look at that and say, 'oh, wait, we have too many Blacks, or we have too many women…or the opposite, 'we don't have enough diversity. We need to search for that.

On the issue of presumptions, Participant 11, offered,

> If one person portrays one image, generally that's the one that is remembered for every one of that race, and you can say that for all races across the board. For example, there is the one black guy who will do one thing, but for people outside of the black community who see that, they might say, 'all black people are like that.'

Evaluations made from the participants noted above are based on conclusions drawn from assumptions about what they see everyday people, who may look like (e.g., gender or race) the

candidates, doing on various SM platforms. This can lead to judging the prospective hire based on visuals or behaviors of others that are similar in gender, color, or status to the candidate.

Awareness and Management of Biases

This category focused on overall awareness and the management of biases. All 15 (100%) participants indicated a strong knowledge of biases and how they could be used for or against an applicant throughout the interviewing and hiring process. All participants noted the importance of being aware not only of personal biases but biases that may arise throughout an organization and then attempting to manage those biases through training or other methods.

Self-awareness of personal biases. It appeared evident in all 15 interviews, that the participants were aware of their personal biases, and were quick to add how they (the participants) kept their biases in check by staying aware of their feelings about situations and pictures that were viewed online. Participant 7 noted,

> I go back to those conversations in my head, and I ask why am I thinking like this? Or if you are thinking like this, what are the facts? How do we dig down to the major concerns, or if my biases are true, how valid are they?

Participant 2 demonstrated his awareness of biases by self-questioning,

> Is this what the person is portraying or is this who the person really is? I will try to look for things or factors that either reinforce who this person is, or they are self-identifying as, or that the box who this person is saying they are.

Acknowledgments like these were popular with all participants, showing that not only are they aware of personal biases that may happen, but they work hard to change their own thought processes.

Awareness of others' biases. All 15 participants spoke of biases in colleagues in their organization, and peers outside of their company.

Three of the 15 participants had like-minded opinions support what Participant 8 stated,

> There's a whole list of views (based on pictures or context found online) that could be viewed as positive or negative it just depends on who's doing the hiring. (Participant 8)

Participant 7 added, "I do see strong pockets of biases in other industries with the influence of social media." In a statement that echoed all 15 participants thoughts, one participant added, "Most people aren't aware of their biases. You have to be extremely self-aware to be aware of your biases, and a lot of people are not" (Participant 12).

In addition to being aware of biases of others in their respective organization, participants were asked if they considered the possibility that others were (or were not) aware of their own biases. Some participant reflections supported the view that many people are aware of their biases, even if they act like they are not. Participant 10 shared a common idea that, "I think secretly everybody knows what they think. They may not want to say it [because] it's not politically correct, but I think people know." Alternatively, in the view of Participant 6, "I think depending on what biases could apply to you, you are probably more aware of those."

The notion that the participants have an acute awareness of not only their own biases but those of others in their organizations was enlightening; however, five participants (33%) agreed that many employers do not believe they have biases; therefore, do not see the need for diversity training to work on those biases. Participant 5 noted, "They [some employers] would not be aware (of their bias). They would say they don't have them." Or as Participant 12 exclaims, "Most people aren't aware of their biases. You have to be extremely self-aware to be aware of your biases, and a lot of people are not".

Declarations like the ones above show the participants' belief t many that many employers are not aware of their own biases and those who are aware, appear willing to overlook them (biases) for the benefit of the organization. That said, it is encouraging to know that when these participants were triggered by their own biases based on images or text on SM, they were

willing to work on changing their behaviors through diversity training or looking for more information about a candidate.

Intuition and subjectivity. Ten of the 15 participants felt that intuition plays a part in how they view prospective hires when using SM to cyber-vet. Subjectivity regarding perceived behaviors can determine, at times, how a hiring manager may respond to a candidate in terms of inviting them for an interview or including them in the subsequent search stages.

> Our first impression on social media can often be if you're lucky they will look past your profile, they may look past your first picture and what it says under your name if you have yourself listed as 'Lisa Raymond' or if you have 'Lisa the bad bitch Raymond.' That may be as much as they ever see or view. That may be a joke that one of your friends called you, but you can very easily fall into a stereotype. And if a hiring manager has that bias, you just added to them. (Participant 2)

All of the participants examined various SM sites for information on candidates. Ten of the participants stated that even though negative images or texts may be observed, they (the participants) were willing to reach out to the candidate for a phone interview or attempt to find positive information on SMOS.

Digs deeper to get answers. In the event that a hiring professional comes across questionable behavior or has concerns from a post on SM, a logical response to the found information may be to dig deeper into the applicant's post by directly asking the candidates questions or looking deeper into their SM page for verification of 'who they are.' Ten of the participants utilize this route when seriously considering hiring an interviewee.

> You have to ask yourself, as I've asked myself, especially with dealing with social media, and can this be applied to real life as well not just on social media? Is this what the person is portraying or is this who the person really is? I will try to look for things or factors that either reinforce who this person is, or they are self-identifying as, or that the box who this person is saying they are. (Participant 2)

> I would have to do my homework because, while social media can be a very useful tool in the hiring process, and I see it all the time, social media isn't always reality. (Participant 11)

The 10 participants who displayed subjective tendencies were the same participants who took the time to dig deeper into a candidate's profile to find more information about the prospective hire. The ability to look deeper into the candidate allowed the participants a better glimpse to make a possibly more thorough assessment before accepting or rejecting a candidate based on a first impression.

Observable Characteristics on Social Media

Participants were asked to describe observable characteristics that could potentially contribute to bias while cyber-vetting. All 15 participants felt that observable characteristics played a role in vetting on SM. Four participants made broad statements that made the researcher believe that observable characteristics online could bias a hiring decision. The following assertions were made; however as participants elaborated, their opinions changed slightly to mimic the belief that observable characteristics can have an impact on decision making (hiring) when SMOS is used to cyber-vet. Participant 10 is the first example with his initial statement,

> I think there's probably cases were people have looked at somebody's Facebook page and said, I don't like the way they look and then crosses them off the list. I'm sure that happens.

However, almost as if he caught himself after that statement, he continued,

> I am a White male, and everybody says we never experience that (being crossed off a list due to the way they look). Maybe like age; I think age could impact lots of people. (Participant 10)

The second participant to sway in observation was Participant 13 as she responded,

> When you see a picture, I think it's that unconscious bias that people start to be like, "oh this guy doesn't look like he's a professional, he's got long hair and dreadlocks, or this person died their hair red, or he looks old or too young." Unfortunately, pictures of people start to make you have some reaction that you probably don't intentionally want to have; it's just our nature.

However, when prompted further, she added clarity to her response by saying, "I think that race, age, could bias them (hiring managers). I know it's not supposed to, but I think that has always been my concern. (Participant 13)

Participant 14 noted that she worked for managers who:

> If they saw somebody and they were not the right color they were not the right age they were not the right sex; they may be given an interview, but it was a joke, and most of the times, their résumé ended up in the garbage. Because they didn't fit.

Observable characteristics found in pictures on SM sometimes contribute to candidates being vilified based on the perception created by negative portrayals in the media or because of others of the same race. Seeing images and making decisions based on SM information rather than the interactions with the candidate leads to the hiring professional to assume that the candidate will not fit the organization.

Blacks, skin color, race. Two of the 15 (13%) participants felt that being black, in skin color or race, could help an individual secure employment just as much, if not more than hurt the interviewees' chances for employment. Their viewpoints were similar when observing images on SMOS as a positive factor in the hiring process:

> I think in this day and age especially with big companies; I think that [skin color] can actually help candidates. That's a huge initiative for a lot of places ... is diversity recruiting. Having people that are in the LGBT community, or people that are obviously black, Asian, Indian, different cultures. I know specifically, not that we joke about it, but were always like excited when we have a good diverse candidate. We get excited because we have somebody that doesn't look like the rest of us here. And I think that something that we are really excited about. So here it can really help candidates here if they have the skill set, that's gonna push somebody over the edge as opposed to somebody who's a White female, or a White male. (Participant 3)

For the remaining 13 participants, the perception of being black, having darker skin color, and race, in general, came up 45 times and was a common factor and sometimes a deterrent for a

minority prospective hire when SMOS is used to cyber-vet. Participant 6 shared her observation of the impact of race by stating,

> I'm gonna go back and say that race and gender I think have a big impact. Do I think that being on social media in general, not so much LinkedIn, but Facebook? Yes, I think perhaps race probably would be the most discoverable.

As a minority, Participant 1 observed race from his own viewpoint by stating, "When you're black, some people are afraid, or intimidated because of what they think, not who you are." This was shared by several of the minority participants as they felt images on SM opened the door for hiring professionals to see a color rather than seeing a person. Participant 4, who is White expressed his belief that race and color is a factor in the hiring process that is easily depicted through images found on SMOS. He emphasized,

> Race is one of the biggest things out there, especially right now. It seems that since the 1964 Civil Rights Act, we've made steps, but it seems like we're taking 20 steps back on a daily basis. I think people do let skin color bias decisions.

Women and gender. Skin color was not the only protected class characteristic that participants felt had the potential to attract bias due to observable characteristics. Eight participants (53%) held the belief that the ability to see gender, more specifically for women, was an observable characteristic that could lead hiring managers to become biased or make decisions based on being a woman. Participant 15 remarked,

> I will say this, probably the thing that an individual sees first I really think is race meaning African Americans and maybe gender, if they are a woman, would be the top two things. Those are the things that you see first on a social site.

Other observable characteristics. Other characteristics that were mentioned as possible factors in SM-generated bias were the ability to observe age, especially older candidates. Six of the 15 participants felt that age could cause biases when seeking to hire. Other visual characteristics mentioned by participants, however at a lesser frequency, were races outside of the Black-White dichotomy (e.g., Asian, Indian), being perceived as LGBT, younger

candidates, and those with a military background. It is evident that intersectionality (combined influences of race and gender, intersections of multiple identity characteristics) could add an additional layer of visual imagery that may bias employers either for or against hiring.

Outside Influences on Decision Making

Nine of the 15 (60%) participants felt that outside influences could bias their decision to interview or make an offer, based on the validity of the claim. The remaining six participants felt that outside influences could not sway them. Below are three subcategories of outside influence.

National politics influences biases. Six of the 15 participants felt that due to the present political atmosphere of the country during the Trump administration, statements and reactions could cause biased reactions in hiring managers when it comes to cyber-vetting. Similar to the political category under red flags, it was also evident that hiring managers political views might bias them if they observed content on SM profiles that they did not like. The following excerpts illustrate this category:

> Racism is alive and well; it's not going anywhere. I hate to say that, but not yet not with the leadership that we have. (Participant 4)

> People feel more empowered [to be biased] because it's happening top-down in the country. (Participant 1)

> I also think if managers were for a political party like Trump, they should be in check of their biases, because his beliefs could influence someone being hired just based on leadership and perceptions of a person's physical characteristics. (Participant 11)

Given the context of the interviews and the focus on SMOS, it appeared that participants felt that Trump's presidency might create some bias both for and against certain candidates based upon what hiring managers observe on candidates' SM profiles. For example, the earlier mention of Confederate flags could suggest that candidates might be excluded not just when they are black, but also if they are White but have more extreme political views.

Influences from other sources. Seven participants perceived that influence from colleagues or other sources could bias their perceptions of a candidate. Participant 15 recalls,

> I did have managers that literally were telling me to cancel interviews or even after they had completed the interviews and had pretty much blown candidates off based on doing some searching themselves as hiring managers and finding information on some of the social media sites.

Participant 11 shared,

> I know on certain websites people can save live videos and share them, so if somebody has a live video and it's full of profanity, they don't seem to talk with any type of understanding, or if it's mumbo-jumbo slang that I can't understand that just gives me an idea of the type of person I'm interviewing when they're coming in.

The frequency of statements like the ones above were noted 11 times, showing that for 46% of the participants, influences from colleagues at work or online media (e.g., posted videos, news outlets) had an effect on decisions to interview or hire candidates.

Findings: Themes

From the categories discussed, four themes emerged through additional analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2019) across the categories that address the research question, "How are biases applied to minority candidates when hiring professionals conduct SMOS during the cyber vetting of applicants?" Some categories of responses did not directly answer the research question but were relevant as secondary outcomes of the research. The themes that resulted from reviewing the relationships in the coding process included: (a) images seen on SM, (b) relying on intuition or subjectivity when cyber-vetting, and (c) informal influence from outside sources, and (d) informal use of SMOS.

Theme 1: Images Observed on Social Media Provoke Bias

Images substantially contribute to how employers paint a picture of the would-be hire. Conventional background checks typically focus on reaching out to previous employers to gain information; however, use of the Internet, specifically SM platforms like Facebook and

LinkedIn, provide opportunities to reach deeper into the life of a candidate to identify if there is a fit. Exposure to pictures of the candidates, as well as their personal and work life, expressed through pictures and posts on their SM profile, opens the door for implicit and explicit bias to occur. One participant discussed his thoughts on how images can bias employers by emphasizing:

> "If you're looking for a certain type of person for your organization and it's all based on looks, if that's your goal, it would exclude people, and they may never know that they had a shot. They may look at Facebook and just say, 'nope. You're out.'" (Participant 10)

Examining images on SM provides employers the opportunity to make observations of a candidate, through the lens of the hiring managers. The hiring manager is likely to have some preferences, biases (implicit or explicit), and triggers (red flags) for what they do not want to see when looking into a candidate (e.g., political imagery). The influence of pictures found on SMOS had a frequency of 34 mentions by 13 of the 15 participants. All agreed that by viewing images, biases can emerge as it becomes easier for hiring managers to make a determination based on (1) what the individual looks like relative to that managers preferences and biases; (2) first impressions and the superficial conclusions that can be drawn based on that appearance in the picture; and (3) relating the candidates picture to either negative (or positive) stereotypes of people who may look like the possible hire. However, the content of posts, in terms of words and language used, also were clearly featured in many of the interviewee's comments. However, it seems pictures were more influential.

Theme 2: Relying on Intuition or Subjectivity When Cyber-vetting

SM platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and others are used by over 3 billion consumers across the globe (Chaffey, 2019). According to Smith and Anderson (2018), 68% of Americans are using Facebook and of that percentage, 74% visit more than once a day;

51% of these users are between the ages of 18-24. Users post personal pictures as a way to connect with family, friends, and others. When asked, many of the participants that looked at pictures that could be categorized as questionable felt that if they liked the candidate or felt they could fit in the organization, extra measures would be taken to dig deeper into SM pages to try to discover who the candidate is versus what the picture shows. Without digging further into a candidates' profile page, assumptions made based on a picture or post could exclude a potentially good hire for the organization. Participant 3 stated,

> If I did have a candidate and it was an inappropriate picture (on SM), I would look at their résumé and then I would have a phone interview to see if what the personality of the picture matched the personality of the person on the phone, because people can do very inappropriate things, but not be like that in a professional setting. There could be a very big difference between the two. Facebook is social, it's supposed to be for entertainment and LinkedIn is supposed to be professional, so I think people make bad decisions, but I don't think it's gonna dictate how they would work in a corporate environment.

Statements like the above show that some employers will do additional research to help establish if a candidate will fit the needs of the organization based on merit, not just relying on a picture or series of pictures found on SM. By taking the extra steps to dig deeper, hiring professional look beyond color, gender, sexual orientation, or any other minority status to determine fit.

Another scenario was shared by Participant 5 about her organization, where even if candidates had questionable images, behaviors, or posts on SM, those negative behaviors would be overlooked if the candidate had the ability to bring in money. This shows that a company might be willing to overlook transgressions for the "right" candidate. However, for others, it seems that subjective and intuitive judgments made about candidates introduce an invisible aspect to the candidate evaluation process that is influenced by implicit or explicit bias. For example, what hiring professionals consider a red flag varies from person to person, such as the example of one interviewee (Participant 7) who noted that he is triggered by candidates from the

LBGTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) community. Therefore, an image of a man in a dress and make-up, or a female dressed as a man might be for or against a candidate, depending on the subjective and intuitive response of the hiring manager. One interviewee even mentioned being triggered by pictures of candidates in military uniform, showing that triggers can vary substantially.

Theme 3: Influence from Outside Sources

Eight of the 15 participants suggested that politics and current political leaders may play a role in how hiring professionals make decisions based on pictures and texts found on SM, or based on their political stance when contrasted with the candidate. Current American political leaders have contributed to the normalization of racism and biases against minority classes. Followers of President Trump's administration tend to be White middle-class men who are reported to want America to be like it once was, before minorities, women, and other classes of individuals that are protected by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. According to an article in the New York Times by Covert (2016, May 16),

> If you ask his supporters, they say life has gotten worse for people like them over the last 50 years. It seems safe to assume that, in the eyes of Mr. Trump's overwhelmingly White male fans, America was greater a half-century ago. Indeed, it was pretty great — for them (para. 3)

The article continues,

> It's not just that factory jobs were more plentiful or that women and minorities were largely kept from positions of power. Large national programs that radically changed the country kept America great specifically for White men (para. 4)

In agreement with the above article, racism and bias against minorities in the US predates Trump's presidency. While Trump stops shy of mentioning a period when America was great, his wording and lack of condemning behaviors of those in his followership base, as well as tolerance for White and religious supremacy groups, permit room for interpretation of his

intentions. On this basis, participants made connections between how SM images and posts might be interpreted and how bias might be endorsed or normalized when spurning minority candidates or those perceived to be "different." For example, Participant 11 said,

> A lot of biases against blacks has [sic] gone up because of Trump being in office right now he speaks very openly about his belief about race and people of different cultures and that's given other people the feeling of since he's doing it, we can say whatever we want, do whatever we want, because that's what we feel. (Participant 11)

Another participant echoed his belief of the role that the political Administration plays in the perception of minorities by saying,

> I also think that politics and what leadership says can hurt. Too many people follow him and can be swayed by what they hear from this administration and react to it. (Participant 9)

However, national politics was not the only factor that influenced recruiters, or other hiring professionals. The problem is that biases are hard to detect or challenge because a hiring manager can search for a candidate on SM platforms, often undetected, and no record is likely to be made that what was observed. However, the results of a search may be the reason for not pursuing an interview with the recruit, especially if there is a large pool of qualified candidates. Participant 4 noted,

> [People] would come to me and say, 'hey I saw this on their Facebook, not so much LinkedIn, you're not able to see those types of pictures out there. But like I saw this out there on Facebook, why don't you reconsider or, take that into consideration.'

This theme captures the statements expressed by many of the participants in regards to how politics, colleagues, or others in an organization may influence the hiring practices of employers based on thoughts and beliefs towards individuals that are different. Behaviors such as this expose biases because it appears that the behavior of discrediting a prospective hire using information on SM may be widely accepted by others that are respected or in a position of authority. However, outside influence was not a factor for a few of the participants. It was noted

that regardless of what others found, participants were willing to do a deeper scrub of information both on SM and in conventional background checks to hire the best candidate possible.

Theme 4: Informal Use of SMOS as a vetting tool

In attempts to verify compatibility, eight participants acknowledged viewing SM sites informally made mental notes (and decisions) based on information found. Participant 1 stated, "It was more (me being) nebby and looking. Going on Facebook put in a name and seeing what pops up and so forth", which seemed to be the case with all eight of the participants. Participant 2 added,

> My employer is usually looking for specific factors, things which would be an indication of character, what type of person we are hiring. Then informally are all of the side notes if someone seems to have risks or risky behaviors, or risk tolerant behaviors, or risk-averse behavior which is just the nature of working in sales and marketing, you need someone with the right mix of the two (Participant 2)

Participants that stated they did not use specific SM platforms like Facebook to formally cyber-vet at the beginning of this interview at times contradicted themselves by revealing that they did get curious, or were instructed by their boss to informally use sites like Facebook or Instagram to acquire information on a possible hire. Some of the participants admitted that the influence from the inner circle of managers or bosses also affected the decision to use SM to vet candidates informally. Participant 4 stated that he did not like to use Facebook to cyber-vet; however, minutes later admitted that his former boss used to make him look at Facebook to gain insight into a candidate's history by looking at pictures and posts for information that could be useful in the hiring process. While this was not consistent amongst the participants, it does, however, paint a darker picture of the use of SM by employers to perform a deeper background check on potential hires.

Other Themes

There were additional commonalities in participants' responses that did not fully develop into themes that are less relevant to the research question, but were potential outcomes of the study.

Giving perspective or advice. All of the participants were asked for parting advice to other hiring professionals that either use or are considering using SMOS as a vehicle to cyber-vet candidates. The following were shared thoughts echoing the importance of training and not just relying on SM:

> If you meet someone and you immediately block them out because of skin color, race, height, weight, whatever, you're really missing out on a lot of people. You are narrowing down your selection by a lot, and it's already hard enough to get good people, so you've got to get over that. (Participant 10)

> Being trained around what your triggers are. That's the first thing. Know what your triggers are. Write them down and have a plan for when you were triggered. (Participant 1)

Thirteen of the 15 (86.6%) of participants shared advice on how to become better organizations and hiring professionals through diversity training and not focusing on SM to learn what a candidate looks like or how they behave. These participants believed in essence that there is potentially more to a candidate than just a picture; however, it is up to the employer to look deeper to find possible answers.

Diversity and Inclusion Methods. Nine of the 15 participants' organizations (60%) either have diversity policies or provide diversity and inclusion training to employees. This training is set-up with the purpose of educating employees and preventing biases when interviewing, cyber-vetting, and hiring candidates. The following excerpts show the importance of and commitment to diversity and inclusion for the participants and the organizations that they represent:

> Our organization is very diverse and promotes cultural diversity. There's corporate level diversity divisions and we have diversity seminars and stuff, so on the flip side perhaps this stuff could begin to benefit instead of causing bias; it could benefit so you could really understand someone's cultural background as you're looking to hire them and working to expand your cultural diversity within an organization. (Participant 13)

> I think that training is something that companies that we work with want to see. That we are taking steps to actively train our recruiters on diversity and inclusion and background checks and cyber checks and how to remove those biases from the work that we are doing. (Participant 6)

This training focused on biases that can be acted upon based on images, context, or information found either on SM sites, face-to-face, or on paper. Sharing thoughts on the importance of diversity training shows that the participants are aware of biases, and continually work with their respective organizations to train people to hire candidates based on what they can do, not just the hiring manager's subjective impression.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the results of the analysis, links the analysis to the research question, and illustrates consistency in the analysis. Fifteen participants were interviewed, and the results were described in depth according to major categories, subcategories, and themes that were guided by the research question. The results are discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

A need exists to examine, expose, work to reduce, or even eradicate the influence of implicit and explicit bias when hiring managers conduct background checks using SM platforms, especially when such behavior results in the exclusion of minorities. Chapter 5 will review the purpose of the study, provide a brief review of the methodology, summarize and discuss the findings, explore the implications of the study, and outline the limitations of this research. This study examined how biases are applied to minorities during the process of cyber-vetting by exploring how hiring professionals find and use information (text and images) on SMOS about candidates.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the study was to identify how hiring professionals' use SMOS during hiring processes and how biases may be activated against minority candidates during this process. This study was needed as hiring professionals might view job candidates' personal and professional information posted on popular sites such as LinkedIn or Facebook to vet candidates before interviewing them or offering them a position of employment. This study also examined how and when biases may be enacted when managers or search committee members look-up a candidate through a SMOS out of curiosity more informally or unofficially, still influencing their views of the candidate.

Research Question

How are biases applied to minority candidates when hiring professionals conduct social media and online searches (SMOS) during the cyber-vetting of applicants?

Summary of Methodology

This study used a qualitative study design and collected data through interviews to describe and explain hiring professionals use SMOS, as means to exploring how biases may be applied when cyber-vetting is used to learn more about a job candidate. The interview protocol (Appendix A) was developed by the researcher with support from the existing literature. The interviewees were experienced human resource management, hiring professionals, or managers with hiring experience or responsibility. Fifteen interviews were conducted, 11 face-to-face and four by phone, lasting between 40-80 minutes. The data were analyzed in Dedoose to identify categories and themes.

The study included hiring professionals from large and small organizations. Fifteen participants were from corporate businesses; one participant was a college basketball coach who cyber-vetted before offering scholarships or hiring assistant coaches. All were decision makers in their organizations or gave recommendations for making an offer to a candidate, requesting an interview, or rejecting a candidate. Three organizations had under 50 employees; four companies had between 51-200 employees; two companies had between 201-500 employees; one company had between 501-1000 employees; two organizations employed between 25k-50k individuals, and three organizations had over 50k employees. Eight participants noted that their company was conservative and traditional having values that were averse to change and relying on a method that has worked in the past. The remaining seven participants noted that their organization is progressive and innovative always striving to keep up with new trends and remaining current and working towards their future and growth. Eleven of the organizations were urban, meaning they were located in a town or city; nine were rural or on the outskirts of a city or beyond; 12 had

facilities that were local to Pittsburgh, and five organizations have international facilities. Many of the organizations had offices in multiple locations.

Eight of the participants were White, six were black, and one was Asian. Ten of the participants were male, and five were female. For this study, race and gender was an important factor as most of the minority participants appeared to be a little more sympathetic and forgiving in how they responded to images on SM. Participant 3 stated,

> I can get over a stupid picture…I would have a phone interview to see if what the personality of the picture matched the personality of the person on the phone because people can do very inappropriate things, but not be like that in a professional setting.

Other participants shared the thought that an image of a candidate behaving inappropriately on an SM platform would cause them (the hiring professional) to deem the applicant no longer viable for employment with the organization.

Major Themes

A total of 49 categories were identified concerning the research question which was reduced into four underlying themes that were important to how biases were applied while cyber-vetting using SMOS. Seven major categories were identified, with multiple subcategories each. Below the seven major categories are briefly summarized, and the subcategories are listed.

SM use. This category explored SM platforms used to discover images or texts to gain information on candidates and included subcategories looking LinkedIn, Facebook, other social SM sites use, and reaching candidates without SM.

Criteria being examined using SM. This category examined information gathered from SM that a hiring professional may use to determine the fit between the candidate and the organization, and included subcategories inclusive of pictures, physical features, and bios; organizational fit, and cultural fit.

SM red flags. This category examined discoveries about candidates made using SM platforms that would cause concern for hiring professionals, and included subcategories such as views on national politics; race; negative attitudes; online persona vs reality; drugs or alcohol use; abuse of others or obvious crimes; name bias; religious beliefs; Confederate flags on page; use of explicit language; extreme views; gang affiliation; job-hoppers; self-aggrandizement; visible weapons; and other red flags.

Biases elicited by SM use. This category identified prejudices that can arise against or for a candidate due to information identified on SM, and included subcategories looking into: Racism; lack of diversity; and assumptions.

Awareness and management of biases. This category explored the realization of prejudices in self and others in an organization when responding to information learned about candidates on SM, including implicit and explicit biases, and included subcategories; self-awareness of personal biases; aware of colleague's biases; are others aware of their biases; diversity/inclusion methods; giving perspective and advice; intuitive, instinct, and subjectivity; digs deeper to find information; and using a standardized approach to cyber-vetting.

Observable Characteristics on SM. This category examined the role of distinctive group membership discovered about candidates on SM. It included subcategories looking into: Blacks skin color, race; women and gender; older candidates; other visual differences; LGBT; and other observable characteristics

Outside influences on decision making. The impact of politics, colleagues, and the news media on hiring professionals who use SM to vet candidates and how it can alter decisions and perceptions looking into influences from national politics, and influences from other influences.

Table 3 shows one example of the underlying codes (Third Level), how they contribute to categories (Second Level), which then resulted in a theme.

Table 3

Findings and Themes

Third Level Codes	Second Level Codes	Themes
Pictures, physical features, and bios Blacks, skin color, race Women and gender Older candidates Other visual differences LGBT Candidate views on politics	Criteria being examined on SM	Images Observed on SM
	Red flags	
Race (color of skin) Online persona vs reality Drugs and alcohol use Name bias Religious beliefs	Observable characteristics	Relying on Intuition or Subjectivity When Cyber-vetting
Self-awareness of personal biases Aware of colleague's biases Diversity and inclusion methods Intuition, instinct, and subjectivity Digs deeper to find information	Awareness and management of biases	
National politics	Political influence	Influence from Outside Sources
Influences from other sources	Managers and coworkers influence	
Facebook, LinkedIn, Other SM sites used Reaching candidates without SM	Social media Use	Informal Use of SMOS as a Vetting Tool
Organizational fit Cultural fit	Biases elicited by SM use	

Techniques for Using Social Media in Cyber-Vetting

Although not a theme, it was interesting to note that the majority of participants stated that cyber-vetting was performed after a resume was received and prior to the interview. LinkedIn was the most used platform as it was seen as a professional site that can legitimately be used by the employer to compare a hard-copy resume with information found on the candidate's LinkedIn page. Facebook, however, was used frequently as an opportunity for the participants to become more familiar with the personal side of the candidate (positive and negative). Through the technique of using sites like Facebook, participants noted that the ability to see images and lifestyles of the applicant enabled them to make an assumption about the candidate that would pre-qualify or disqualify them for the opportunity of an interview. As SM platforms and cyber-vetting techniques varied by participants, four themes were identified that had an impact on hiring professionals' approach to interviewing, dismissing, or hiring candidates for their organization based on findings on SM. These four themes are described in the following sections.

Theme 1: Images Observed on Social Media

The first theme focused on how images are observed on SM. Images found on SM were shown to be an area of concern for all participants; as all utilized at least one SMOS platform to cyber-vet. Although many of the participants stated they did not let personal biases related to pictures or context found to dictate whether they made an offer or not, it was evident that some images could change perceptions of a candidate based on what did outside of a job. This agrees with the theory of Implicit Bias as Greenwald et al. (1998) explains that implicit biases are judgments that are activated without the performers' consciousness to the stimuli. Social attribution theory (Chan et al., 2005; Heider, 1958; Knouse, 1989) also applies here as it suggests

that when minority group members are evaluated by others, flaws are typically attributed to their minority status (e.g., race, disability) rather than individual characteristics (e.g., being a jerk).

Similarly, attributes of the stereotypes about a group can unfairly be applied to members of that group without sufficient evidence or reason. Therefore, it is more likely that those reviewing minorities might be actively seeking flaws (e.g., perceived promiscuity) that they can attribute to the individual's group membership (e.g., female) rather than looking at the images and not anticipating those flaws. However, all participants expressed that they also knew of other hiring professionals that used SM platforms to make some decisions solely based on what was found in SM images. Participant 15 shared,

> I would definitely say hiring decisions [here] are based on race. Mainly because that's the visual that you see before you even get into content. What you see is that visual. I definitely would say that influences it.

This statement reaffirms that information identified on SM can and has resulted in candidates no longer being considered for employment due to what was observed on a candidate's profile. This type of bias, when examining images, may evoke certain assumptions about the candidate due to information observed. Whereby an HR professional may disregard a candidate because they do not want to hire someone who is of a particular gender, race, or other grouping (explicit bias), or is subconsciously influenced to make negative assumptions about a candidate (e.g., assuming or looking for evidence laziness) because of stereotypes held in their mind about a group without awareness of that bias (implicit bias). Lee et al. (2018) also contend that the notion of fear from experience(s) may factor into a hiring decision based on an image that evokes a negative memory evoking implicit bias against an applicant.

Theme 2: Relying on Intuition or Subjectivity When Cyber-vetting

The second theme that was reoccurring for the participants was relying on intuition or subjectivity when using SM to cyber-vet. This theme was closely connected with the category of

digging deeper to find more information about the candidate prior to deciding to interview or hire. This theme examined tensions of subjectively and intuitively responding to SM-based information when making hiring decisions, versus being self-aware of bias subjectivity and choosing to overrule intuition and go after the facts. As noted, most participants were attempting to identify candidates that would fit (or not fit) the organization. Even if negative images were found while cyber-vetting, over one-third of the participants would dig deeper into SM or make attempts to do further research before discounting the candidate. This practice aligns with checking for person-organization fit as, "The compatibility between people and organizations when (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both" (Kim, 2012, p. 831). This was shown when Participant 2 noted,

> I've asked myself, especially with dealing with social media, can this be applied to real life as well, not just on social media? Is this what the person is portraying or is this who the person really is? I will try to look for things or factors that either reinforce who this person is, or they are self-identifying as, *or is it the thought of who this person is saying they are and how they will fit our organization*.

Participant 2 then shared his analysis of seeing something negative on an SM site,

> When I look and somebody is using "tha cru" obviously a bastardized misspelling based on Ebonics, but then I look at their education and it says that they have a master's degree in English from Duquesne University, I know that this person is just writing in a stylized fashion. If I look and it says 'attended such and such high school', didn't graduate, this is really how they speak because they don't know how to spell. I look for the subfactors that will start to show who the person is beyond the initial self-portrayal.

A discovery that many of the participants made was that by taking a moment to dig deeper (to satisfy a gut feeling) into the candidates' background after finding initial negative material led to conclusions that the individual was worth interviewing, and sometimes even hiring. These hiring professionals were, therefore, willing to partition away information that was not directly relevant to performing the job, was possibly ambiguous or unclear as to what it implied about the candidate's character, needed confirmation, or played into stereotypes.

Theme 3: Influence from Outside Sources

The third theme involved influences from outside sources. These sources ranged from individuals within the organization to national political leaders who could potentially sway the hiring professional's view of information on SM. Participant 9 exclaimed,

> As recruiters, all were looking for our little red flags. And, as soon as I find one little red flag, I'm going to find something else. Or, am I thinking that I found something else. I also think that politics and what leadership says can hurt. Too many people follow him [Trump] and can be swayed by what they hear from this administration and react to it.

Participants also noted that co-workers or colleagues played a role in hiring decisions. The notion that outside sources could influence a candidate's chance of employment or even an interview agrees with the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). For example, while performing an informal search, the hiring professional could be impartial in reviewing material identified on SM. However, if a co-worker (subjective norm) observed negative pictures, behaviors, or content then mentioned what they found to the hiring professional, that may be enough to persuade the recruiter to rescind an offer for an interview or employment or cause them to see or focus on information they might have otherwise overlooked. The same thought process is true with political leadership. If the recruiter aligns with the beliefs of a political leader and their perception of minorities, seeing an image on SM could trigger the recruiter's biases based on the narrative of that political leaders regardless of the qualifications of the individual (e.g., of immigrants 'taking our jobs').

Additionally, the uncertainty reduction theory supports the belief that the use of SMOS contributes to the attitudes that employers or their colleagues may have when SM is used to assess the applicants' background, ethics, and appearance before the interview or hiring. Zschirnt and Ruedin (2016) conclude, "Ethnic minority status may be such a signal that members of a particular group are less skilled or otherwise unsuited" (p. 3). In this sense, minority status is

used as a proxy for what is unknown about a candidate – the recruiter *fills in the blanks* where there is insufficient information about a candidate, by making assumptions about who they are based on stereotypes about ability, character, or tendencies. These types of stereotypes brought on by experiences or erroneous information provided by others can cause the employer to make decisions based on minority status rather than what a candidate can do.

Theme 4: Informal Use of SMOS as a Vetting Tool

The final theme centered on informal use of SM as a vetting-tool providing participants with the ability to observe the person they were considering for employment prior to actually meeting the candidate. In looking at images, recruiters' perceptions of minorities may be influenced by the picture of a candidate leading to implicit or explicit biases based on prior assumptions or external influences of what a minority are like (e.g., all blacks are loud and ignorant, women cannot think for themselves). Banaji and Greenwald (2013) have confirmed that mindbugs (false feelings of trust or distrust) arise as "the social group to which a person belongs can be isolated as a definitive cause of the treatment he or she receives" (p. 17). This does not only happen with race or ethnicity, as Banaji and Greenwald discovered the same behaviors towards all minority classes (p. 17). Thus, using SM informally to identify candidates by looking at images (and other content) can evoke biases in a recruiter. Participant 2 shared,

> My employer is usually looking for specific factors, things which would be an indication of character, what type of person we are hiring. Then, informally, there are all of the side notes [we use]. If someone seems to have risks or risky behaviors, or risk tolerant behaviors, or risk-averse behavior we need to know.

He continued,

> It sometimes takes a lot of money to look like somebody of a lower-class. It's a stylistic point of view, but when people try to portray themselves in those ways, you can be any color, you can be any gender and put yourself in a bad image.

Another example would be from Participant 4 who describes his boss who prior to hiring a woman looked at her Facebook in an informal search. The woman, black and religious, was not what his boss was interested in hiring. Crenshaw (1989), acknowledges the effect of intersectionality where characterizes, such as race, gender, and religion in this case, compound to influence negative attitudes to another person. By relying on a picture, employers' perceptions, fears, and biases are evoked to make decisions that exclude rather than include minorities.

Practical Implications

Based on the information collected by the researcher, candidates may be excluded from employment based on biases that are generated during cyber-vetting using SM in the hiring process. Alexander et al. (2017) suggest that over 46% of candidates do not get hired due to an image found on SM. Understanding how this influences minorities will support future research on solutions to equip and train hiring managers to look beyond an image and appropriately explore information about the candidate before disqualifying them from employment. My study shows that the utilization of SM platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, and others were being used in an uncontrolled way at the time of this study.

The results of the study imply that organizations need a well-defined hiring policy and should require diversity training that is inclusive of SM use during the hiring and cyber-vetting process, and how to overcome biases. First, training should be based on self-awareness of biases and taking responsibility to identify areas where personal growth is needed through awareness of biases each manager may encounter during the cyber-vetting process. Secondly, this research also shows a need for policy and guidelines in organizations surrounding the use of SM during the hiring process as well as required documentation of the use of SM during the cyber-vetting process (e.g., yes no questions to hiring manager about whether they view SM, whether or not

they were informed of information on SM by others about candidates, and the nature of the information and how it was applied).

A practical application of the research findings could be training workshops that include personal use of SM (e.g., protecting self while building a brand, whether or not to post; will it hurt your job search), privacy settings on SM, deleting old or inappropriate information, and improving understanding of company's typical recruitment and selection practices. Such a workshop would need to include the mechanics of privacy settings explaining the differences between default and user selectable options that might prevent users without immediate or first level relationships with the candidate from seeing anything more than a basic profile. It could also show candidates how to conduct an SMOS that would reveal what employers might see.

The results of this study show that the way recruiters vet candidates is changing relative to what studies like Schmidt and Hunter (1997) found when reference checks were more common. At the organizational level, by employing social networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram during cyber-vetting, employers are engaging in proactive vetting of posted images and text that might contribute to biases against minority candidates. As a result of this growing trend of informal and formal cyber-vetting, employers must be able to recognize any area for biases (implicit or explicit) that will allow for the denial of employment or interviews based on materials that have been identified on SM. However, there are also implications at the societal level. By addressing the awareness of how images found on SM might allow for biases to impede applicants from attaining employment, steps can be taken to alter how searches are completed, what information should be identified on SM, and what information is off limits. Organizations like LinkedIn can also examine their role in supporting private users and companies use of SM in healthy ways with appropriate limits. With this,

accountability measures must be taken through policy and procedures by employers and SM providers to protect both the employer and the applicant from various forms of discrimination and stereotypes based on cyber-vetting.

Theoretical Implications

On a theoretical level, the literature review for this study included five theories Implicit Bias Theory (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger, & Calabrese, 1975), Attraction Selection Attrition Theory (Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995), Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977), and Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958). Of the five, each appeared to be relevant to the findings and was supported by this study. Employers seemed eager to reduce uncertainty regarding hires (uncertainty reduction theory) and therefore any information discovered, through any source whether formal or informal, appeared to influence decisions. However, some of the HR professionals saw a paradox here in that they recognized that further uncertainty or risk might be introduced by overreacting to information discovered about a candidate through an SMOS, suggesting the need to corroborate any suspicions with further information. The study also found that employers were driven to select prospective employees that fit the organization (attraction selection attrition) both culturally (working with other employees) as well as through possessing skills necessary to complete tasks effectively, even where the cultural fit resulted in some bias.

Many hiring professionals admitted that they, and others they have observed, were influenced by images found online (e.g. color, sex, disability, and age), which were used informally or without explicit awareness as possible reasons to not hire or interview a candidate, providing evidence of the influence of implicit bias (theory) . Although infrequent, participants believed that implicit bias became a factor when images reminded the recruiter of negative

behaviors from a specific culture or group. The researcher also discovered that the theory of reasoned action played a role in hiring decisions by identifying how social norms may influence a particular course of action. In this instance, the theory of reasoned action and implicit bias work together to produce a decision about a candidate where both internal or implicit biases and social norms (e.g., others' comments or views on information from an SMOS) influence the hiring of minority candidates. Lastly, dispositional and situational factors (attribution theory) can play a role in the decision-making processes of a hiring manager where minority candidates' behavior, shown in images or through other information discovered through an SMOS, were connected to their racial, gender, or other grouping. While internal attitudes and tendencies (making the same types of choices based on individual beliefs) appeared to play a part in the hiring process for this study's participants, the researcher also discovered that external factors (other managers or employees, or political leadership) may also influence behaviors of the recruiter when cyber-vetting using SMOS.

Opportunities for Further Research

Opportunities exist for future research to confirm that biases arise when hiring managers and professionals examine SM pages of participants. One method might be to update the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995) to mimic SM pages on various platforms. Doing this would combine images and context to images to assess the effects on hiring professionals in a controlled setting. This would allow the organization to locate where areas of diversity training could be utilized to combat implicit biases within the organization. A comparative quantitative study would be helpful to confirm the findings of this study and further validate the use of the qualitative interview protocol utilized in this study as it relates to hiring biases that result when hiring professionals conduct cyber-vetting with the use of popular SM

platforms. This additional research possibly could encompass smaller organizations based on specific locations in the nation (e.g., only Southern states, only Northern states, only Eastern states, only Western states) to observe regional differences based upon political and conservative tendencies that might vary by state. This would serve to determine if similar results would be found, indicating that SM images do in fact influence hiring practices within companies based on the location and size of the organization.

Additional research is also needed from the perspective of the minority candidate to ascertain if they believe or are aware of hiring professionals use of SM profiles to make hiring decisions. Further research could also address the types of images that can be located during an Internet search and the validity of the images as a source of information. It would also be important to research the degree of awareness that candidates have of privacy options and controls on SM platforms, and if they use these options to protect themselves from employers that use SM as a vetting tool. Is there a conscious awareness that images or texts could hinder opportunities for employment? Do candidates think this is fair? Is there a true understanding of biases and what they are, how they can affect employment, or does it matter? Additional research from the candidate's perspective would complement the current study.

Limitations

Application of this study's results may be limited to organizations that currently use the Internet as a cyber-vetting tool with similar demographics to those described in chapter 4. For example, smaller organizations without hiring professionals might have different patterns of use of SM information in hiring practices (e.g., small businesses that make up a large part of American employers). Another limitation to the study could be volunteer bias, the error that results when volunteer participants respond differently than the general population would

respond (Demir, Haynes, Orthel-Clark, & Özen, 2017). Based on the demographics of the participants, factors such as participant race, gender, and location of the organization could bias and ultimately influence the study. The results may also not apply to organizations that rely solely on standard background checks that contact candidates' prior employers for information on performance. Secretaries and assistants who may help vet candidates were not interviewed for this study, which also may exclude additional perspectives or influences on hiring.

Conclusion

This study examined various organizations both large and small, diverse as well as predominantly White. Participant 5 mentioned,

> It is no coincidence to say that even here in the city of Pittsburgh, there is a number of [organizations like ours] that when you look at the amount of people of color who actually are in HR, there is only myself and one other woman.

This was a frequent declaration of more than half of the participants. Even with the protections against discrimination of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 Title VII (*Civil Rights Act of 1964 § 7, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e et seq*, 1964) and the number of large companies that espouse a commitment to diversity, what rings true in the majority of this study's interviews was that organizations often lean towards hiring people who look like them in a demographic sense, as suggested by Attraction-Selection-Attrition theory (Link & Jeske, 2017).

SM use provides the opportunity for users to post images which in turn allows recruiters to use those pictures to help determine whether the candidates appear like they might fit the organization. These types of pictures combined with (sometimes negative) images portrayed through television shows and in the media can influence recruiters to make off-based ethnic generalizations leading to job rejections for the minority candidate. According to Entman (1990), modern day racism becomes "an updated and veiled form of anti-black sentiment" (p. 333). Not all interviewees demonstrated such sentiment, but it was evident that such bias still exists, and

more damaging is that there is still an unwillingness to acknowledge that racism and bias in hiring still exists. These types of attributions (Knouse, 1989) can cause an unseen discomfort level in dealing with people that one is not familiar with, even if it is only a difference in skin tone. Increasing diversity and inclusion is challenging at times, and it takes a commitment from the organization, the human resource management team, and overall leadership to break the barriers and look beyond what may be displayed about a person on SM. The diversity lends for the inclusion of thoughts, ethnicity, and behaviors that are different from the norm of the organization but can enhance the culture of the corporation if given an opportunity.

The goal of the recruiter or hiring professional should be to hire the most qualified person for the job regardless of color, gender, age, or any other category of discrimination. It is up to that recruiter to find out who the candidate is on paper, as well as online, and if there is an organizational fit that warrants an interview or ultimately an offer of employment. Decades ago, a résumé and background check backed by a previous employer was standard; however, in today's technology-driven society, searching online sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and others have allowed not only friends and family, but recruiters to have a peek into the lifestyle that is portrayed in pictures and postings over time for almost anyone to see.

Stereotypes about minorities often lack any basis in reality, but once invented, are often carried over from generation to generation. In this way, SM can be used to vilify and sometimes confirm the perception of what a minority *is*, based on an image. For the black community, generational bias has stifled the hiring process, and this is potentially extended through reliance on perceptions resulting from online SM posts and activity (e.g., liking a post).

Inclusion through offers of employment should not mean forcing organizations to hire applicants that would not fit the job or organization just because of minority status. However,

proper diversity training must ensure that hiring professionals are aware that information on SM is not always correct and can be tainted by implicit biases against people who are members of specific groups. It was interesting that none of the participants verbalized the feeling that cyber-vetting was an intrusion or invasion of the candidate's privacy; however, cyber-vetting was seen as a justifiable means to ensure that the candidate would respectively fit the culture and organization. Moreover, participants thought that overall SM was fair game with the attitude that *if they post, we will look.*

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Appendix A - Interview Protocol

The purpose of this research is to study hiring professional's use and perceptions of social media and online searches during cyber-vetting and hiring and selection processes. For that reason, a purposeful sample of 12 hiring professionals is being recruited. You were selected to participate in this study because of your knowledge and experience in hiring. Your participation will require an in-depth, semi-structured interview lasting approximately one hour. In limited cases, an additional brief telephonic interview may be needed for the purposes of clarification or extension. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study, nor are there any direct benefits to you. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from this project at any time.

Please remember that your responses will be recorded in confidence, and all identifying descriptors of your identity and work affiliation will be changed to protect your identity in the final published study. Additionally, if you request it, you will have the opportunity to review a typed transcript of the interview session, and to offer revision or extension of that transcript.

BACKGROUND DATA COLLECTION

To begin the interview, I want to make sure you are comfortable with me audio recording this interview? The audio recording will be transcribed and permanently deleted. Do you have any questions of me before we begin?

Please describe for me your professional background experience in the hiring process.

1. Can you please self-identify (age, sex, race)?
    a. How many years have you been in your current position?
    b. Have you had any professional role as a manager outside of the human resources capacity?
    c. How long have you been in human resources or in role that includes hiring of candidates?
    d. If so, can you tell me briefly about that experience?

2. What role do your play in recruiting, selecting, vetting and hiring candidates?

3. Tell me a little about the companies where you have been in a position to vet and hire candidates.
    a. Size?
    b. Multiple branches or divisions?
    c. Location (e.g., rural/urban, local/international)
    d. What industry or industries is it engaged in?
    e. How old were the organizations? (Rough category is fine)
    f. What is the culture of the organization broadly? For example, is it conservative or progressive, is it innovative or more traditional?

MAIN INTERVIEW

For the remainder of our time, I am going to ask you to focus on describing your own experiences, values, beliefs, feelings and thoughts as they relate to cyber-vetting, selection, and the use of social media and online searches during the selection process and during any background checks that are done. It is important for me to try and capture rich detail about your own perceptions with these experiences. You are encouraged to share your observations and experiences without making specific reference to your current or previous employers, as well as sharing what you have heard from other HR professionals or observed indirectly.

Cyber-vetting, for the purposes of this study, is: The process by which employers acquire information about candidates by using online sources to research and make hiring decisions.

Can we continue?

- Can you describe the process of how cyber-vetting using social media and online searches is carried out in your organization to research a candidate?
    - When is cyber-vetting usually done?
    - Who does it?
    - What search engines or sites do you frequently use to research candidates?
    - Is it formally or informally a part of the selection process (e.g., documented)?

    - Have you had experience when managers or search committee members bring information to you regarding candidates that they found in their own searches completed as a result of their own curiosity or interest?
- Which aspects of using SMOS during the selection process are the most important or valuable to you and your organization?
- Can you describe what you are looking for and thinking as you are viewing social media or conduct online searches to make the decision to interview or hire a candidate?
- What information gather during an SMOS would indicate a potentially good or poor fit between the candidate and the organization or job for you?
- What are some possible red flags that you or others look out for when conducting SMOS?
    - When looking at these sites, what types of things are you (specifically) looking for?
    - What types of things do you see the candidates doing or writing that concerns you?
    - What images found on SMOS cast a negative perception on a candidate?
- Do you think some information collected from SMOS might bias a hiring manager/professional for or against a candidate?
    - What kind of information might result in such bias?
- Which categories of minority status (e.g., race, gender, age) do you think are most negatively impacted by SMOS? Why? Can you give examples?
- Focusing specifically on observable characteristics like skin color, race, gender, or ethnicity that might be discovered through images or other information available online, do you think that SMOS results in bias against some candidates because of these characteristics?
- Everyone has conscious and unconscious biases. When you come across information during an SMOS that might bias you – such as just getting a bad feeling about a candidate – how do you respond to or handle that internal response?
- Would you say that you and others you have observed are generally aware of their own biases when reviewing written or visual information discovered during SMOS?
- What advice would you give HR managers in general to ensure that SMOS are used in an unbiased and effective way?

Appendix B – Introduction Email

Dear *Participant,*

I am writing to you to ask for your participation in an interview for my dissertation research to fulfill the requirements for a Doctorate of Science degree from Robert Morris University. _____ from _____ recommended that I talk with you.

The purpose of my study is to research Bias During Cyber-Vetting Using Social Media and Online Searches. You were selected because of your expertise and experience in hiring. The interview will be completely confidential and take an hour to complete. We can talk in person, by phone, or via video chat, at a time that works for you.

I hope you consider my request, and are willing to participate in my study. Once I have your response I will send you a consent form and will propose times and dates for us to meet for the interview. If you have any questions regarding my study, please, do not hesitate to ask. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Lisa Raymond

Appendix C - Study Consent Letter

CONSENT TO ACT AS A PARTICIPANT IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Study Title: Bias During Cyber-Vetting Using Social Media and Online Searches

Researcher: Lisa Raymond

Before we begin the interview process, please read the following consent form carefully, and sign below stating you agree to participate in the study. It is important for you to understand that your participation in this study is voluntary and the information you share will be confidential.

Introduction

This study will collect data through in-depth interviews for the purposes of exploring hiring professional's use and perceptions of social media and online searches during cyber-vetting and hiring selection process. The interview process will be conducted by Lisa Raymond, a doctoral candidate at Robert Morris University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Doctorate of Science degree. You were selected because of your expertise and experience in hiring.

Procedures

You will participate in an interview to determine the potential biases that may arise while cyber-vetting candidates using social media and online searches. The interview process will be recorded and will take approximately one (1) hour to complete.

Risks/Discomforts

This survey poses no known risks. Answering the questions is unlikely to cause an additional discomfort beyond your normal day-to-day activities.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to the participant. The study's findings will be used to contribute to the knowledge of the use of cyber-vetting.

Confidentiality

All recordings, transcripts, and interview notes will be kept confidential, as the researcher and her research supervisor will be the only ones with access to those materials. Your name and your company's identifying information will not be mentioned in any published study reports. Once the interview has been transcribed the audio recording of the interview will be permanently deleted.

Participation

Your participation is voluntary. Refusing to participate will involve no penalty or other negative consequences. You may withdraw from the study at any point during the study. You may choose to not answer any question asked of you.

Payment

Your participation is voluntary and unpaid.

Questions

If you have any questions at any time, please contact the researcher, Lisa Raymond, at 412-XXX-XXX or through email at XXXXXX@mail.rmu.edu.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office at Robert Morris University at 412-397-6227.

Acknowledgement to Participate

I have read and understood the purpose of the study being conducted by Lisa Raymond. At this time, I do not have any further questions that may deter me from participating in the study. By signing this form, I agree to participate in the study.

_____

Participants Printed Name

_____ _____/_____/_____

Participant Signature Date

Appendix D – IRB Approval

Dear Raymond, Lisa C

Your application, entitled *Bias During Cyber-Vetting Using Social Media and Online Searches*, has been reviewed by the Robert Morris University Institutional Review Board (IRB). After extensive review, our reviewers have approved your application.

This email serves as final verification and approval of your application #201805231756. You may begin conducting your research. This application expires 3 years from this approval notice. If you wish to continue your research after that time, a new application must be submitted.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email us at irb@rmu.edu.

Regards,

The RMU IRB Committee

Robert Morris University
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Moon Township, PA
15108-1189

412-397-3000

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