A Field Experiment of Race, Gender, and Parental Status Discrimination in the United States

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The data file provided here ("FieldExp_Public") is the product of a field experiment examining hiring discrimination by race, gender, and parental status in the United States.[1] We provide relevant information about the data collection process here. A summary of variables is located at the end of this document.

Overview of the Field Experiment

To generate the jobs for the field experiment, we sampled job postings in the 20 largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) in the United States, with a maximum of one MSA per state. To obtain the sample of job postings for each MSA and occupation, we drew from two sources: (1) an online job posting site that we have given the pseudonym Jobposting.com, and (2) job posting data from Burning Glass Technologies (henceforth "Burning Glass"), a company which scrapes the web for job postings across a variety of platforms.

We sampled jobs in a total of six occupational categories with varying required education levels: administrative assistant, customer service, software developer, lower-skilled sales, higher-skilled sales, and cook. In order to better align our sample with the broader labor market, we obtained a larger number of postings in MSAs with larger populations and a smaller number of postings in MSAs with smaller populations.[2] The job postings for the field-experimental data were drawn between October of 2017 and September of 2018.

Experimental Manipulations

There were three key experimental manipulations in the field experiment: race, gender, and parental status. To signal applicant race, we used first and last name combinations that were consistently perceived as black (Ebony Banks, Tyra Washington, Terrell Booker, and Darnell Jackson) and as white (Robert Andersen, Seth McGrath, Stephanie Walsh, and Allison Becker).[3] The gender of the fictitious applicants was also signaled through first names that were consistently perceived as being men or women. For parental status, we used two experimental manipulations. For parent resumes, we either listed hobbies that the applicants do with their children (e.g., "In my free time, I enjoy going camping with my kids.") or listed volunteer participation in a local Parent Teacher Association. For the non-parent resumes, we listed similar hobbies, but without "my kids" or volunteer participation in a neighborhood association that was not connected to being a parent. Each posting was randomly assigned to include a parental status manipulation or not. If the parental status manipulation was included, two sets of applicants of the same race and gender who varied in parental status were submitted to the posting. Otherwise, all applicants were non-parents and the applicants covered the four possible race and gender combinations.

All other aspects of the resumes were kept consistent within occupations, however, there were differences between occupations in the employment and education histories of our applicants.

For occupations often requiring more education (e.g., higher-skilled sales, administrative assistant, and software developer), all applicants had six years of prior work experience in the relevant field and held a bachelor's degree from a four-year institution in the primary state associated with the MSA in which we were applying. For occupations often requiring less education (e.g., lower-skilled sales, customer service, and cook), all applicants had eight years of experience and held a high school diploma. Again, the specific high school was a real school in the state associated with the MSA. Years of experience differed between the two sets of occupations in order to keep age constant. We also drafted cover letters containing the work experience listed on the resumes.

Applying for Jobs

Each week, the researchers would submit four resumes to every posting across two consecutive days, submitting two resumes on the first day and two on the second. Once the application was submitted, research assistants checked the appropriate voicemail and email accounts for employer responses. Responses were coded as callbacks if the applicant received a positive response from the employer. Automated responses from employers confirming receipt of application were not coded as callbacks.

Additional Notes on the Data File

The data file is structured at the application level (e.g., each row in the data file is an application). There were four applications submitted to each posting and, thus, there are four rows in the dataset for each unique job posting identifier.

Field Experiment Codebook

Variable Name	Description	Coding
id	Unique identifier for each job posting	Unique number for each job posting
callback	Indicates whether the application received a callback	1 = Received callback 0 = Did not receive callback
black	Race of applicant	1 = African American-sounding name 0 = White-sounding name
woman	Gender of applicant	1 = Woman-sounding name 0 = Man-sounding name
parent	Parental status of applicant	1 = Application signaled being a parent 0 = No parent signal on application
msa	Metropolitan Statistical Area from which job posting was drawn	Name of MSA listed
occupation	Occupation of job posting	1 = Administrative Assistant 2 = Cook 3 = Customer Service 4 = High-Skilled Sales 5 = Low-Skilled Sales 6 = Software Developer

Endnotes

[1] Generous funding and support for this project was provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Russell Sage Foundation, the Washington Center for Equitable Growth, the UPS Endowment Fund at Stanford University, the Sociology Department at Stanford University, IRiSS at Stanford University, and the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard University.

[2] When identifying postings on Jobposting.com, we searched by each zip code in a given MSA. In a few cases, when no job postings were available in a given zip code that matched our criteria, openings slightly outside that zip code would be presented by Jobposting.com. These postings were included in our sample, which means a small number of job postings on Jobposting.com came from just outside the selected MSA. Additionally, after months of sampling from both Jobposting.com and Burning Glass, we took a short break from sampling and then continued the field experiment by sampling from just Jobposting.com. After that point, Jobposting.com blocked applications from three of our applicants. Thus, the field experiment results from that point forward were compromised. We can see in the data the date at which Jobposting.com blocked certain accounts because the callback rates dropped to zero for the affected applicants for all jobs sampled after that date. The data after the accounts were blocked are not included in the data file.

[3] We conducted a survey experiment on Amazon.com's MTurk to test the perceptions of various names. Additionally, we note that while respondents in the survey experiment may have racialized conceptions of these "white" names when explicitly asked about the race they associate with the name, it is unclear whether real employers actively think of applicants with these names as white during the hiring process or whether these names default to assumptions of whiteness.