

Effects of Race and College Prestige on Job Hiring

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Abstract

Our study examined if race and college prestige affected an applicant's likelihood of getting hired. We had undergraduate students score the resumes of four different applicants for a marketing job on how likely they thought the applicants were to get hired. The race of the applicant was either Caucasian or African-American and the college they attended was either prestigious or non-prestigious. The other aspects of the resumes were held very similar in quality. We did not find statistically significant effects of race or college prestige on the participants' scores of how likely the applicant was to get hired. We also did not find a statistically significant interaction between race and college prestige. Despite the results not being significant, there were trending effects for race, college prestige, and the interaction of the two, suggesting that hiring biases may exist in society due to one's race and college prestige.

Keywords: hiring, biases, race, college, prestige, employment, discrimination

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When an individual applies for a job, they almost always turn in a resume listing their skills, experiences, and other career-related factors. However, employers may often consider more than just the applicant's accomplishments and abilities when selecting who to hire. There are other factors indicated by one's resume, such as socioeconomic and cultural ones, that play a role in the hiring process. The question is how influential these factors actually are in the hiring process.

An applicant's race may be considered in whether they get hired or not. Correll, Bernard, and Paik (2007) studied the influence of certain factors on how competent and hireable an applicant is perceived. Specifically, the effects of parenthood, gender, and race were studied. This was done by manipulating resumes to make the applicant become either a mother or not a mother, a father or not a father, and African-American or Caucasian. The candidate's race was manipulated by changing their name on their files to become stereotypically African-American or Caucasian names. Regarding race, Correll et al. (2007) found that African-American applicants were offered \$6,800 lower starting salaries than Caucasians. However, the contents of the resume between the African-American and Caucasian applicants were exactly the same, suggesting some form of discrimination.

Most resumes also include a section where you list your past education, including where you attended college. Trusheim and Crouse (1981) studied whether or not college prestige impacts occupational status and income. The results showed that higher college selectivity was found to have a statistically significant effect on income. The study analyzed not only the prestige of the participants' colleges but also personal characteristics, such as mental ability and achievement motivation, that may contribute to occupational success. They found that these

personal characteristics are prevalent in those from prestigious colleges and that they are what largely account for their career success. Whether it's personal attributes or the prestige of the college itself, there seems to be some kind of relationship between attending a prestigious college and becoming successful at one's job.

Lemelle (2002) examined how race, gender, and educational class impacts occupational prestige. The results of this study found that attaining a college education eliminates the advantage of white males over black males. This showed that black males who received a college education achieved similar occupational prestige and income as white males. Although there is still a clear occupational and income gap between Caucasians and African-Americans, college education appears to play a role in negating this difference. Since college education has this kind of effect, it may also be possible that attending a more prestigious college may eliminate employment and hiring biases for African-Americans more than attending a non-prestigious college would.

Our study intended to examine if race and college prestige play a role in influencing how likely someone is to be hired. We did so by putting our participants in the position of the employer looking at resumes. We tested whether they had biases towards the race and college prestige of the applicants. This is significant because certain racial groups, such as African-Americans, still face significant discrimination in today's society. Our goal was to find out if this discrimination exists in the workplace hiring process. In addition to this, we wanted to see how significant of an advantage attending a prestigious college automatically gives an applicant. Summarily, this study aimed to test whether the hiring process is fair and unbiased or not.

We predicted a main effect of race such that if the candidate was Caucasian, he would be more likely to get hired than if he was African-American. This is because we believed that an

implicit hiring bias against African-Americans exists within both our participant pool and our society in general. We also predicted a main effect of college prestige such that if the candidate graduated from a prestigious college, he would be more likely to get hired than if he graduated from a non-prestigious college. This is because we believed that most people automatically regard someone as more intelligent, hard-working, and capable if they attended a prestigious college. However, we believed that college prestige would negate any biases towards race in the hiring processes. Therefore, we predicted an interaction where at the level of attending a prestigious college, Caucasians and African-Americans would be equally as likely to get hired. However, at the level of attending a non-prestigious college, we predicted Caucasians would be more likely to get hired than African-Americans.

Method

Participants

Undergraduate psychology students (13 females, 1 male, age range: 19-22 years) from a psychological research methods course at University of California, Los Angeles served as the participants for the study. Participation was required as part of the course requirements.

Design

The experiment utilized a 2x2 within-subjects design. The first independent variable was the race of the applicant. The two levels were African-American and Caucasian. This was indicated through the name listed on the resume, which was either a name considered stereotypically African-American or stereotypically Caucasian. We chose Jamal Williams and DeAndre Brown for the African-American names and Lucas Johnson and Kyle Louis for the Caucasian names. The second independent variable was prestige of the college attended. The two levels were a prestigious college and a non-prestigious college. A prestigious college was one

that most of the general population considers elite and selective. We chose Columbia University and Yale University as our prestigious colleges. A non-prestigious college was one that most of the general population regards as very average in reputation and educational quality. We chose University of Wyoming and California State University, San Bernardino as our non-prestigious colleges. The dependent variable was how likely the participants would be to hire the applicant on an interval Likert scale of 0 to 9. In this scale, 0 was “very unlikely to hire” and 9 was “very likely to hire.” The value for the dependent variable we used in analysis was the average score given to each resume between all the participants.

Materials and Apparatus

A room large enough to fit the participants and the experimenters was used. The participants needed a pen for the experiment. They were given an instruction/scoring handout and a packet of four resumes.

There were four different resumes that each participant received in a stapled packet. The main manipulations between each resume were the changing of the applicants’ names (to signify race) and the college they attended. Two applicants had stereotypically African-American names, which we selected based off an online search of most common African-American first and last names. The other two applicants had stereotypically Caucasian names, which we selected based off an online search of most common Caucasian first and last names. The colleges listed on the resumes were selected by our considerations of which colleges were regarded by the public as prestigious or non-prestigious. One African-American applicant and one Caucasian applicant attended a prestigious college, and the other African-American applicant and the other Caucasian applicant attended a non-prestigious college.

Each resume held in common the applicant's name up front in bold, large letters. All four resumes also contained sections indicating education, professional summary, skills, and work experience in that order. The education section listed the college they attended and their major. Each applicant had a major that wasn't directly related to the field of marketing. The professional summary section listed each applicant's career interests and main skills. The skills section listed five to six career skills of the applicant. Either two or three of these skills related directly to the field of marketing, and the other half were valuable but generic career skills. The work experience section listed three jobs with each being similar in prestige and responsibility. The first job listed was always a job at their college. The second job was always a marketing internship or job that gave the applicant experience in the field of marketing. The third job was always one that gave the applicant managerial or leadership experience. Each of the three jobs occurred at a similar time frame between the four resumes. Other things held constant or similar throughout the resumes were a professional and clear style of writing, an intelligent vocabulary, and similar font styles and sizes. This was done to prevent certain applicants from seeming more or less intelligent and professional than the others, which could have resulted in confounding variables. All four applicants were male so that gender wouldn't have an effect on scoring. The order of these resumes in the packet were counterbalanced so that there were four different orderings of the four resumes. This was utilized to prevent the effects of confounding variables caused by the order in which the participants read the resumes.

Procedure

The experimenters told the participants that they would be passing out the instruction/scoring handout and a packet of four resumes. However, they instructed the participants not to start reading the instruction/scoring handout until they received their resume

packet. They also instructed the participants to start reading through the resumes as soon as they were finished reading through the instructions on the instruction/scoring handout. The experimenters then instructed the participants to indicate to them when they were done with all four readings and scorings so that they could collect the materials. The experimenters then passed out the instruction/scoring handouts to the participants. After this, they handed out the resume packets, which were counterbalanced in terms of ordering. The passing out of the resume packets was done utilizing random assignment.

Once each participant received both the instruction/scoring handout and their resume packet, they started reading the instruction/scoring handout. The instruction/scoring handout informed the participant that the four resumes were from four different applicants applying to a marketing job for Amazon.com. It then gave basic background information of this job. Next, it told the participant to assume the position of the employer, read the resumes, and then score each resume on a scale of 0-9 on how likely they would be to hire each applicant. It also told the participant to not move on to the next resume until they were finished scoring the one they were on. Below these instructions were the four applicants' names with the scoring scale from 0-9 under each name. Each scale had boxes under each number for the participant to mark their score in.

Once finished reading through this handout, the participants began reading through the resumes. After reading through the first resume, they scored the applicant on the score table that corresponded to the applicant's name, which was on the instruction/scoring handout. They then did this for the next three resumes. Once finished with reading the resumes and scoring the applicants, each participant indicated to the experimenters that they were finished and the experimenters collected the resumes and instruction/scoring handout from them. After collecting

all the resumes and instruction/scoring handouts, we then used the instruction/scoring handouts for data analysis. We found the mean score given to each applicant between all the participants. These mean scores became the dependent measure for each condition. Finally, we ran a 2x2 within-subjects ANOVA and paired sample t-tests on the data.

Results

Figure 1 presents the average score of the applicant's likelihood of getting hired when they were Caucasian vs. African-American and as a function of the prestige of the college they attended. Looking at the pattern of results displayed in Figure 1, it appears that applicants, in general, were not given a significantly higher score when they were Caucasian than when they were African-American. In addition to this, applicants, in general, were not given a significantly higher score when they attended a prestigious college over a non-prestigious college. There was no significant interaction between the race of the applicant and the prestige of the college they attended.

To test for possible effects, the data were analyzed using a 2x2 within-subjects ANOVA, which did not reveal a significant main effect of race, such that the applicant's average score was not significantly higher when he was Caucasian ($M=6.679$, $SD=.434$) than when he was African-American ($M=6.071$, $SD=.256$), regardless of the prestige of the college they attended, $F(1,13)=2.230$, $MSE=5.161$, $p=.159$. No significant main effect for prestige of the college attended was found, such that the applicant's average score was not significantly higher when he attended a prestigious college ($M=6.750$, $SD=.313$) than when he attended a non-prestigious college ($M=6.000$, $SD=.403$), regardless of their race, $F(1,13)=3.162$, $MSE=7.875$, $p=.099$. Additionally, the apparent interaction between the applicant's race and college prestige that is indicated in Figure 1 was found to be not significant, $F(1,13)=1.331$, $MSE=4.018$, $p=.269$.

To compare individual condition means, multiple paired sample t-tests, with a Bonferroni correction to maintain an alpha level of .05, were conducted. When the applicant was Caucasian, the applicant's average score was revealed to not be significantly higher when they attended a prestigious college ($M=6.7857$, $SD=1.62569$) than when they attended a non-prestigious college ($M=6.5714$, $SD=1.98898$), $t(13)=.493$, $p<.630$. When the applicant was African-American, the applicant's average score was revealed to not be significantly higher when they attended a prestigious college ($M=6.7143$, $SD=1.13873$) than when they attended a non-prestigious college ($M=5.4286$, $SD=2.17377$), $t(13)=1.662$, $p<.120$. Thus, as indicated in Figure 1, college prestige did not significantly affect the applicant's average score when the applicant was either Caucasian or African-American.

Furthermore, when the applicant attended a prestigious college, the applicant's average score was revealed to not be significantly higher when the applicant was Caucasian ($M=6.7857$, $SD=1.62569$) than when the applicant was African-American ($M=6.7143$, $SD=1.13873$), $t(13)=.173$, $p<.865$. When the applicant attended a non-prestigious college, the applicant's average score was revealed to not be significantly higher when the applicant was Caucasian ($M=6.5714$, $SD=1.98898$) than when the applicant was African-American ($M=5.4286$, $SD=2.17377$), $t(13)=1.486$, $p<.161$.

Discussion

Our experiment's results did not end up supporting our hypothesis. We did not find a significant main effect of race or college prestige on how likely the applicant was to get hired. Nor did we find a significant interaction between race and college prestige. Although none of our results were significant, we did, however, see trending effects with race, college prestige, and the interaction between the two.

Our results did not show a significant main effect of race on how likely the applicant was to get hired. However, we did see a trending effect where African-Americans were given, on average, noticeably lower scores than Caucasians. To compare with the study conducted by Correll et al. (2007), they found a significant main effect of race in which African-Americans received starting salary offers that were, on average, \$6,800 less than that of Caucasians. This study utilized the same method of manipulating race through using stereotypical Caucasian or African-American names on the resumes. Like ours, this study also relied on a sample of undergraduate students for participants. Lastly, this study was similar to ours in that all the applicants had resumes that were very similar in quality. In both of our studies, the accomplishments and quality of writing were made to be very similar among the different resumes to prevent these from becoming confounding variables. Despite these similarities, Correll et al. found a significant effect, while ours did not. However, there were distinct differences between our studies that may explain this difference. First of all, Correll et al. found this significant difference in terms of the starting salary the participants assigned to the applicants. Meanwhile, ours was based on how likely the applicant was to get hired. These are two very different measures. Salary and likelihood of getting hired do not represent analogous aspects of the hiring process. Therefore, they should not be regarded as analogous dependent measures. Second of all, prior to the actual experiment, Correll et al. pretested the different versions of the resumes to see if they were of equivalent quality. Once they confirmed that they were, the actual experiment was then conducted. Our study did not use any pretest to confirm that our four different resumes were of similar quality. Therefore, we cannot be sure that they were truly similar in quality. As a result, we cannot confidently assume that any differences in scoring were due to our independent variables of race and/or college prestige. Nonetheless, we

saw a trending effect where Caucasians were, on average, scored as noticeably more likely to get hired than African-Americans. This suggests that there may exist a possible implicit bias against African-Americans within our participants. The fact that this difference was seen in such a young, liberal, and socially conscious population makes it a very interesting result.

Our results did not show a significant main effect of the prestige of the applicant's college on how likely they were to get hired. However, we did see a trending effect where applicants who attended prestigious colleges were given, on average, noticeably higher scores than applicants who did not attend prestigious colleges. Like our study, Trusheim and Crouse (1981) studied the effects of going to a prestigious college on one's career. They found a strong relationship between going to a prestigious college and having a higher income. However, our studies differed in certain ways. Trusheim and Crouse measured occupational income, while ours measured the likelihood of getting hired. Therefore, comparisons between the two studies cannot treat the dependent measures as the same. If our dependent measure was something along the lines of assigning an appropriate salary to the applicant, then our two studies would be more comparable. Additionally, Trusheim and Crouse further researched why individuals from prestigious colleges tend to be more successful in their careers. They found that it was mainly due to personal characteristics conducive to success, such as motivation and focus. Meanwhile, our study did not further examine why our participants scored applicants from prestigious colleges higher on average. Nonetheless, it is very intriguing that both of our studies' results showed some level of occupational advantage after the attendance of a prestigious college.

Our results did not show a significant interaction between the applicant's race and college prestige. However, we did see a trending pattern where both Caucasian applicants and African-American applicants received similar mean scores if they attended a prestigious college. But, of

those who attended a non-prestigious college, Caucasian applicants scored noticeably higher than African-American applicants. Therefore, we found a similar result as Lemelle (2002), which showed that receiving a college education eliminates the advantage white males have over black males regarding occupational prestige. The most notable difference between our two studies was that Lemelle used self-reported data from real life individuals. Meanwhile, our study presented fictitious applicants to participants to measure biases. Therefore, the results of Lemelle directly show the real-life occupational differences due to race and education. On the other hand, our study just suggests the existence of biases that might be leading to these differences. Also, the education measurements of Lemelle looked at the attainment of a college education in general. They did not differentiate between the prestige of the college attended as ours did.

Our study faced a few limitations that likely prevented it from being fully successful or entirely applicable to the general population. Certain features of our participant pool may explain why we did not receive a significant main effect for race. The first is that we used undergraduates with limited experience with employment, hiring, and career experiences. Therefore, using undergraduates to evaluate the applicants does not compare to how a real employer would evaluate applicants. Using actual employers, or at least adults with a fair amount of career experience, would have given our study more valid and realistic results. The second feature is that the student population of University of California, Los Angeles has a remarkably liberal social climate. Specifically, they frequently hear discussions and teachings about the benefits of racial diversity and acceptance through campus organizations, university diversity initiatives, etc. Our university's pro-diversity environment may have made our participant pool less discriminatory towards the African-American applicants than the average American adult would have been. Using participants from a university with a more varied social climate would

be a potential solution for this issue. An example would be using participants from a university whose student body is equally liberal and conservative.

The major limitation regarding college prestige was how the participants of our study already attended a prestigious college. They studied at the University of California, Los Angeles, which is regarded as one of the most elite and prestigious universities in the United States. Therefore, these participants may have had considerably higher preference and bias for prestigious colleges like their own. A solution to this would be to use undergraduates from a moderately prestigious college.

A major issue regarding external validity was how our participant pool had 12 females and only 1 male. The fact that most of our participants were female may have had some kind of an impact on our results. Furthermore, this gender imbalance means that we can only really apply our results to female employers, thus limiting external validity. Another issue regarding external validity was our participants' very limited age range. Our participants' ages ranged only from 19-22. Most employers are well above this age range, which limits how externally valid and applicable our results are.

There are other topics related to our study that would be beneficial to research. For example, racial and college prestige biases aren't the only ones that exist within the areas of employment and hiring. Looking into the effects of other attributes, such as sexuality, age, and appearance on hiring decisions, would likely result in the discovery of more biases. An additional research topic that would likely provide important results would be which demographics or groups of people most commonly hold these hiring biases. Additionally, it would be important to discover if these biases are mostly implicit or explicit in nature. All of these avenues of research would provide immensely useful information for reducing biased

hiring practices. Biases and discrimination in the workplace is a vastly affecting and common problem, so researching and discovering ways to reduce them is exceptionally important for making our society's workforce fair and unprejudiced.

The implications of our study have immense importance regarding our society's workforce. Our results suggest that certain biases in the workplace are more widespread than we may believe they are. Concerning racial biases in our society, explicit ones have been and continue to be strongly fought against. However, our study suggests that negative attitudes towards races like African-Americans still persist in a more implicit, subconscious level. Now, it is important for both companies and society in general to work on fighting these attitudes. And, in the same way we looked for college prestige biases as well, it is crucial that we continue to seek out and address additional biases in order to make employment in our society as nondiscriminatory as possible.

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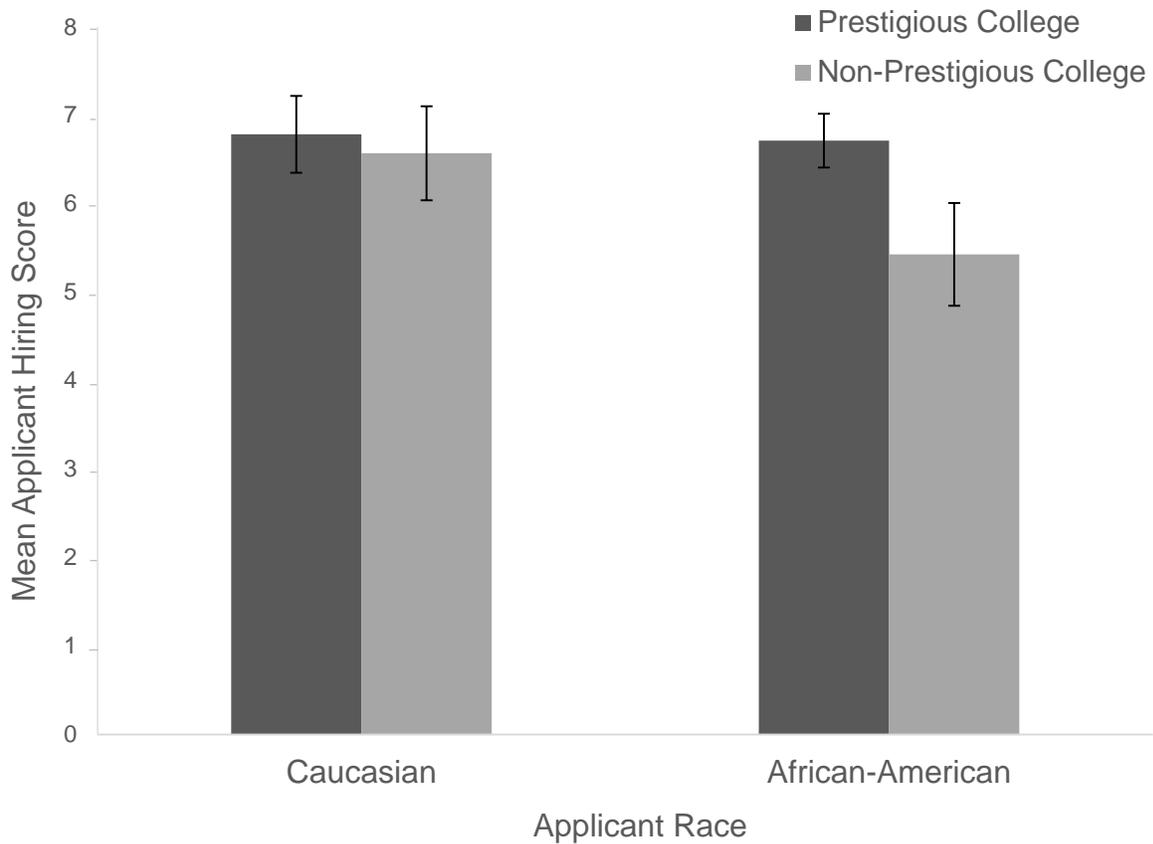


Figure 1. The mean “likelihood of getting hired” score each applicant received as a function of race and the prestige of the college attended. The error bars represent the standard error of the mean.