

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

FOR BLACK APPLICANTS, THE HIRING MARKET HASN'T CHANGED MUCH IN 25 YEARS

Study finds white applicants receive more invitations for first-round interviews than similarly qualified African-Americans

By John Simons
October 3, 2017

Despite widespread corporate diversity efforts, black job candidates have made little headway battling discrimination over the last quarter-century, according to a new analysis.

A study of résumé responses and hiring behaviors finds that white applicants received 36 percent more invitations for first-round interviews than African-Americans in 2015, a figure that hasn't changed in 25 years. Experts say this points to deep-rooted bias in the U.S. labor market.

Researchers from Northwestern University, Harvard University and two European research institutes analyzed data from some 30 separate studies of hiring outcomes conducted between 1989 and 2015.

Some of the studies involved responses to résumés of fictionalized matched candidates of different races and ethnicities sent by mail or submitted online. The résumés conveyed equivalent education and work experience, and differed only in that some contained ethnically identifiable names or other clues that signaled the applicant's race.

Other studies tracked how frequently companies followed up with people who posed as equally qualified candidates of different races and ethnicities and applied for jobs in person. In total, the data represent 55,842 applications for 26,326 positions.

Using fictionalized candidates is the standard way discrimination is studied – sending in two candidates whose only difference is race or ethnicity. Studies using real candidates would be flawed, says lead researcher Lincoln Quillian, because variables such as differences in schooling or work experience could affect hiring managers' decisions.

Researchers say the results were similar regardless of applicants' gender, education, experience, or across industries and job types.

At a time when large companies have publicly stated that diversity is a priority, and numerous surveys show whites support equal treatment of minorities, the results are surprising, says Mr. Quillian, a faculty fellow at Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research.

Mr. Quillian believes hiring managers may be ignoring company protocols and making snap judgments about candidates based on their personal prejudices. "Even for well-intentioned employers who think about treating all applicants the same, bias is entering into their decisions," he says.

The **analysis** was published last month in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences journal.

One bright spot researchers found: Hispanics appear to have made gains in the hiring market over the period. In 2015, Hispanics were called in for interviews 10 percent fewer times than whites with similar experience and credentials, compared with 23 percent in 1990. But researchers cautioned in their paper that too few studies had included Hispanics to make a definitive conclusion.

A **recent paper** from the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco expressed concern over the increasing pay gap between whites and African-Americans. In 1979, black men earned 80 cents for every dollar of hourly wages earned by a white male. By 2016, that number had fallen to 70 cents. Black women in 1979 earned 95 cents for every dollar in hourly wages earned by a white woman. In 2016, it was 82 cents.

The Fed speculated that factors such as discrimination, differences in school quality, or differences in career opportunities are behind the gap.

That gap has big implications, said Mary C. Daly, director of the San Francisco Fed's economic research department. "Disparities in labor income pass through to lower consumption, savings and wealth, which ultimately makes individuals and families more vulnerable to economic shocks," she wrote.

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