

What's in a Name? A Multiracial Investigation of the Role of Occupational Stereotypes in Selection Decisions

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Bertrand & Mullainathan (2002) found evidence that race-typed names can have a significant influence on the evaluation of résumés. The current study expanded on their research by manipulating both the race (Asian American, Black, Hispanic, White) and quality of the résumé (high, low), and by considering occupational stereotypes as an explanatory mechanism. White male participants ($N = 155$) read a fictitious résumé, evaluated the applicant, and judged his suitability for jobs. The results revealed that Asian American individuals were evaluated highly for high-status jobs, regardless of their résumé quality. White and Hispanic applicants both benefited from a high-quality résumé, but Black applicants were evaluated negatively, even with strong credentials. Results of mediation analyses demonstrated that occupational stereotypes accounted for the relationship between race and evaluations of applicants.

Despite progress in the treatment of stigmatized individuals over the past half century, there is little doubt that discrimination still exists in social and work contexts (for a review, see Hebl, King, & Knight, 2006). Preliminary evidence has suggested that workplace discrimination may derive from *occupational stereotyping*, which is “a preconceived attitude about a particular occupation, about people who are employed in that occupation, or about one’s suitability for that occupation” (Lipton, O’Connor, Terry, & Bellamy, 1991, p. 129).

Research on occupational stereotyping has demonstrated the impact of gender on perceptions of job suitability and salary expectations (e.g., Beggs & Doolittle, 1993; Cash, Gillen, & Burns, 1977). Studies focusing on race-

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based discrimination have revealed that Black individuals are hired at a rate lower than Caucasian individuals (e.g., Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2002). However, little research has extended these ideas to potential implications across multiple racial groups. Moreover, previous research has not examined occupational stereotypes as a mechanism by which inequity in selection decisions may operate. Thus, the current study contributes to a critical body of research by investigating the evaluation of Asian American, Black, Hispanic, and White job applicants from the theoretical perspective of occupational stereotyping.

Occupational Stereotyping

Stereotypes permeate each aspect of the selection systems, from attraction to attrition (Hebl et al., 2006). In particular, selection decisions that are fraught with uncertainty and made with limited information may rely heavily on stereotypes. Negative stereotypes about racial group members may bias perceptions for job suitability through a mechanism of jobholder schemas (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Decision makers may unconsciously develop a mental model (i.e., a schema) about the attributes of jobholders. This schema then influences hiring and promotion decisions, as well as other personnel decisions. In other words, mental models about the characteristics of individuals who tend to hold particular jobs will influence the perception of applicants to those jobs.

Furthermore, a jobholder schema is race-based when one race occupies the job under consideration or the pool of applicants for such jobs (Powell & Butterfield, 2002). For example, because Hispanic individuals make up a large portion of lawn keepers, Hispanics may be part of a mental model for this low-wage job. So, when people think of a lawn keeper, they may imagine the lawn keeper as Hispanic. As a consequence, Hispanic applicants may not be considered fully for jobs in which they are not easily imagined (e.g., accounting).

Status characteristics theory describes a similar mechanism through which the impact of stereotyping in the workplace could be generated (Berger, Fisek, & Norman, 1998). This theory suggests that people form expectations about the competence of others based on inferences from the status value assigned by the society as a whole to their personal characteristics. Race is a personal characteristic with status value. In our society, White men are held in high position and esteem, are seen as more suitable for prestigious positions, and, therefore, are granted higher positions in all realms of our society (e.g., business, academia, and politics; Powell & Butterfield, 2002). As a result, when evaluating applicants with similar qualifications for

a high-status job, a decision maker may favor White men because historically they have held the highest status and are seen as the most suitable (Ayman, 1997; Knight, Hebl, Foster, & Mannix, in press).

Although the consequences of occupational stereotyping have not yet been explored fully, the content and pervasiveness of occupational stereotypes have been considered across multiple studies. For example, Shih (2002) conducted 145 in-depth interviews with employers in four different industries and found evidence of stereotyping. Employers were asked about their attitudes toward Black and immigrant Hispanic workers. Their responses revealed that these employers purposefully sought individuals from these two racial groups because they perceived them to be more manageable and pliable than other racial groups. In other words, Black and Hispanic individuals were deemed more suitable for low-skill occupations as a result of being perceived as easily controlled and manipulated.

The aforementioned occupational stereotypes may have been activated through the simple information of an individual's name. Names are not arbitrary labels; they can convey information about the sex, age, and race of a person (Young, Kennedy, Newhouse, Browne, & Thiessen, 1993). For example, the name "Latoya" is a common Black name conveying that the person is both a woman and Black, whereas "Emily" conveys that the person is a White woman (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2002).

In the context of race, several studies have revealed troubling findings based on the manipulation of targets' names. For example, Terpstra and Larsen (1980) had graduate students in management evaluate résumés for three types of jobs: Black-typed, White-typed, and neutral. Participants evaluated a high- and low-qualified Black applicant, as well as a high- and low-qualified White applicant for each of the three jobs. Participants gave every applicant a hireability rating, a starting salary assignment, and indicated which of the applicants they would choose if only one position was available. As expected, applicants with Black names were rated as more suitable for the Black-typed job, while those with White names were rated as more suitable for the White-typed job.

To further investigate discrimination in the labor market, Bertrand and Mullainathan (2002) manipulated the race of names on high- and low-quality résumés from men and women to be either Black or White. Approximately 5,000 résumés were sent in response to employment ads for available sales, clerical, administrative, and management positions. As predicted, White-named applicants had a 10% chance of being called for an interview, while Black-named applicants had only a 6.7% chance: a racial disparity of almost 50%. Just as importantly, the quality of the résumé mattered only if the applicant had a White name; high-quality résumés received 30% more callbacks for interviews than did low-quality résumés. As for Black-named

applicants, those with low-quality résumés were almost as likely to be called for an interview (6.4%) as were Black-named applicants with high-quality résumés (7.0%). This small difference in callback ratings occurred despite large differences in experience, honors, and skills on the résumés. Furthermore, differences in callbacks between occupations emerged, suggesting, but not directly assessing, that occupational stereotypes may have influenced the decision to call back certain applicants. In particular, the largest discrimination ratio occurred for administrative positions, in which White-named applicants were 64% more likely to get a callback than were Black-named applicants.

These findings reveal a pervasive problem for minority job applicants. The problem is exacerbated when the small representation of minorities in most high-status, high-pay occupations is taken into account. On the one hand, when the proportion of racial group members is small, evaluations of minorities are likely to be driven by stereotypes (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Huffcutt & Roth, 1998). On the other hand, when levels of group representation are high, evaluations of racial minorities are more likely to be driven by objective credentials. To the extent that employers continue to rely on occupational stereotypes and maintain low proportions of minority employees, minority applicants will continue to be the victims of discrimination.

In accordance with past findings and theory, three hypotheses are tested. First, it is hypothesized that the implied race of the individuals will be enough to prime racial stereotypes and, thus, will have a significant effect on the evaluation of applicants. Because of their status as *model minorities* (i.e., stereotyped as highly educated, professional, and capable; Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000; Ying et al., 2001), we predict that Asian American applicants will be rated just as favorably as White applicants and that both groups will be rated higher than will applicants with Black and Hispanic names.

Second, we propose that race-typed names will interact with the quality of the résumé. Specifically, only Asian and White applicants are expected to benefit from a high-quality résumé; Black and Hispanic applicants with good credentials are expected to benefit less than their counterparts.

Finally, it is expected that occupational stereotypes will account for the relationship between race and the evaluation of applicants. Specifically, the extent to which applicants are judged to be appropriate for high-status jobs and inappropriate for low-status jobs will mediate the relationship between race and applicant evaluations. Thus, the current study extends the research that was outlined previously (e.g., Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2002; Shih, 2002; Terpstra & Larsen, 1980) by including Asian and Hispanic applicants, and by investigating occupational stereotypes as a potential mechanism accounting for discrimination in selection decisions.

Method

Participants

Participants, who were approached by one of four undergraduate experimenters in a large metropolitan downtown pedestrian area and airport, were asked to volunteer in the study without compensation. Of the initial 160 participants, 2 indicated a race other than White, and 3 did not fully complete the questionnaire. Therefore, the final sample included 155 participants, all of whom were White adult men, ages 18 to 73 ($M = 34.91$, $SD = 11.19$), and who had an annual income of at least \$15,000. Because they are responsible for the majority of selection decisions in organizational contexts (see Valian, 1998), White men were targeted as participants.

Design

A 2 (Résumé Quality: high/low) \times 4 (Résumé Race: Asian, Black, Hispanic, or White) full factorial design was used to explore the effect of applicant race and résumé strength on occupational suitability and ratings. Specifically, the applicant's college education and grade point average were manipulated, as well as his employment experience and activities. The race of the résumé was manipulated by using a stereotypical Asian American ("Lee Chang"), Black ("Jamal Jenkins"), Hispanic ("Jose Gonzales"), or White ("James Sullivan") male name for the applicant.

Materials and Procedure

Participants read a résumé that included the applicant's name (in bold letters), education, employment history and experience, and activities and interests. Participants then provided an overall evaluation by responding to 16 questions about the applicant using a 7-point Likert-type scale, which ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very*). Sample items include "How intelligent do you think this individual is?"; "How motivated do you think this individual is?"; and "How likely would you be to hire this individual?" (see Appendix).

Following the Cattell scree test, a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation revealed one meaningful factor with an eigenvalue of 7.97 that accounted for 49.83% of the variance. The internal consistency reliability for these items was .91.

Next, participants indicated the applicant's suitability for 12 different occupations. Once again, the response scale was a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*not suitable*) to 7 (*very suitable*). A principal components factor analysis

with varimax rotation revealed two meaningful factors following the Cattell scree test. The first factor, which we labeled *high-status occupational suitability*, had an eigenvalue of 5.14 (43.08% of variance) and included chemist, physician, architect, engineer, computer programmer, judge, and pilot. The second factor, labeled *low-status occupational suitability*, had an eigenvalue of 4.32 (27.15% of variance) and included custodian, kitchen staff worker, construction worker, public transportation employee, and repairman.

All item loadings were greater than .65. Items were averaged within each factor to create variables for analysis. The internal consistency reliabilities for both high- ($\alpha = .91$) and low-status occupations ($\alpha = .92$) were acceptable. At the conclusion of the survey, participants provided their gender, age, race, occupation, and salary.

Results

A two-way (Race \times Quality) ANOVA was performed on each of the dependent measures: overall evaluation, high-status occupational suitability, and low-status occupational suitability. These analyses were followed by a two-way (Race \times Quality) ANCOVA mediation analysis using high-status and low-status occupational suitability as covariates in predicting overall evaluations.

Overall Evaluation

Significant main effects for race, $F(3, 148) = 3.32, p < .05$; and quality, $F(1, 148) = 63.83, p < .01$, on overall evaluation emerged. In the case of race, Asian American targets were evaluated the most positively ($M = 4.67, SD = 0.12$), whereas Black targets were assessed the least positively ($M = 4.19, SD = 0.12$). Targets with high-quality résumés ($M = 4.85, SD = 0.08$) were evaluated more favorably than were targets with low-quality résumés ($M = 3.91, SD = 0.08$). A significant two-way interaction also emerged, $F(3, 148) = 2.92, p < .05$, suggesting that the influence of résumé quality on overall evaluation depends on the race of the target (see Figure 1).

Specifically, independent-sample t tests suggest that White individuals benefited most from improved résumés, $t(37) = 4.45, p < .01$ ($M_{\text{diff}} = 1.87$); and that Asian American applicants were rated positively, regardless of the strength of their résumés ($M_{\text{diff}} = 0.79$; see Table 1 for all means). Consistent with previous research and the current hypotheses, Black individuals did not benefit as greatly from improved résumés as did White individuals, $t(37) = 1.63, ns$ ($M_{\text{diff}} = 0.57$).

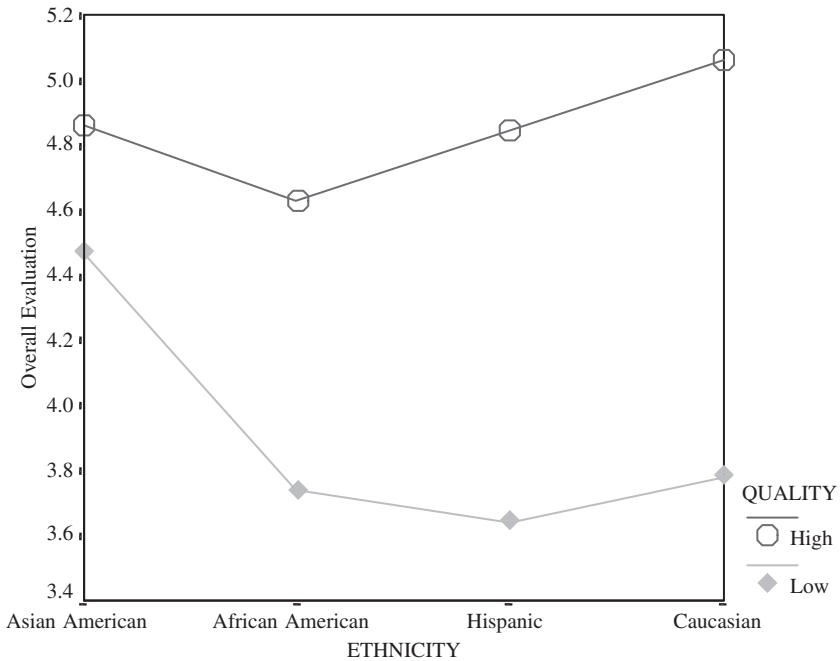


Figure 1. Overall evaluation of targets as a function of race and résumé quality.

High-Status Occupational Suitability

With regard to suitability for high-status occupations, significant main effects for race, $F(3, 148) = 8.55, p < .01$, and quality emerged, $F(1,$

Table 1

Means of Study Dependent Variables as a Function of Résumé Quality and Ethnicity

	Caucasian		African American		Hispanic		Asian American	
	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
Overall evaluation	5.06	3.78	4.63	3.74	4.85	3.65	4.86	4.47
High-status occupations	4.44	2.50	3.50	2.87	4.17	2.08	4.72	3.93
Low-status occupations	2.22	3.03	2.11	4.43	2.47	4.27	2.33	3.05

148) = 52.28, $p < .01$. In the case of race, Asian American targets were perceived to be the most suitable for high-status jobs ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.19$), whereas Hispanic targets were perceived to be the least suitable ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 0.19$). Targets with high-quality résumés ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.13$) were perceived to be more suitable for high-status occupations than were targets with low-quality résumés ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.13$).

The analyses also reveal a significant two-way interaction, $F(3, 148) = 4.08$, $p < .01$, suggesting that the influence of résumé quality on perceived suitability for high-status occupations depended on the race of the target (see Figure 2). Independent-sample t tests conducted for each race demonstrate that Asian American, Hispanic, and White individuals were perceived to be more suitable for high-status occupations when they had a high-quality résumé than when they had a low-quality résumé (all $ps < .05$). However, Black applicants with high- and low-quality résumés were perceived to be equally suitable for high-status jobs, $t(37) = 1.63$, ns .

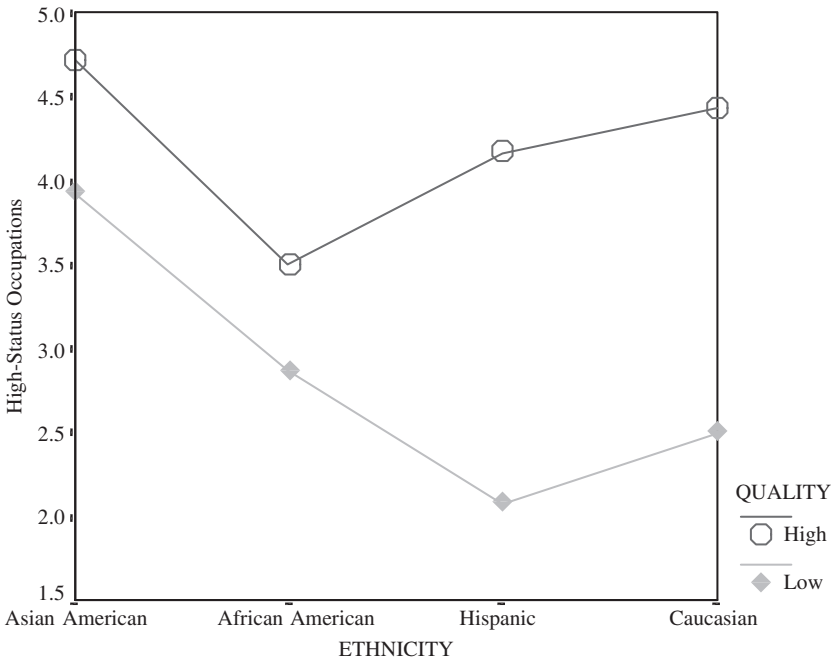


Figure 2. High-status job suitability of targets as a function of race and résumé quality.

Low-Status Occupational Suitability

Significant main effects for race, $F(3, 148) = 3.19, p < .05$, and quality emerged, $F(1, 148) = 42.67, p < .01$, with regard to perceived suitability for low-status occupations. In the case of race, Hispanic targets were perceived to be the most suitable for low-status jobs ($M = 3.37, SD = 0.21$), whereas White targets were perceived to be the least suitable ($M = 2.63, SD = 0.22$). Targets with high-quality résumés were perceived to be less suitable for low-status occupations ($M = 2.28, SD = 0.15$) than were targets with low-quality résumés ($M = 3.70, SD = 0.15$).

The analyses also reveal a significant two-way interaction between résumé race and quality, $F(3, 148) = 3.21, p < .05$, suggesting that the influence of résumé quality on perceived suitability for low-status occupations depended on the race of the target (see Figure 3). Specifically, among applicants with low-quality résumés, Black individuals were perceived to be the most suitable for low-status occupations ($M = 4.43, SD = 0.31$). Among applicants with high-quality résumés, Hispanic individuals were rated as the most suitable ($M = 2.47, SD = 0.30$).

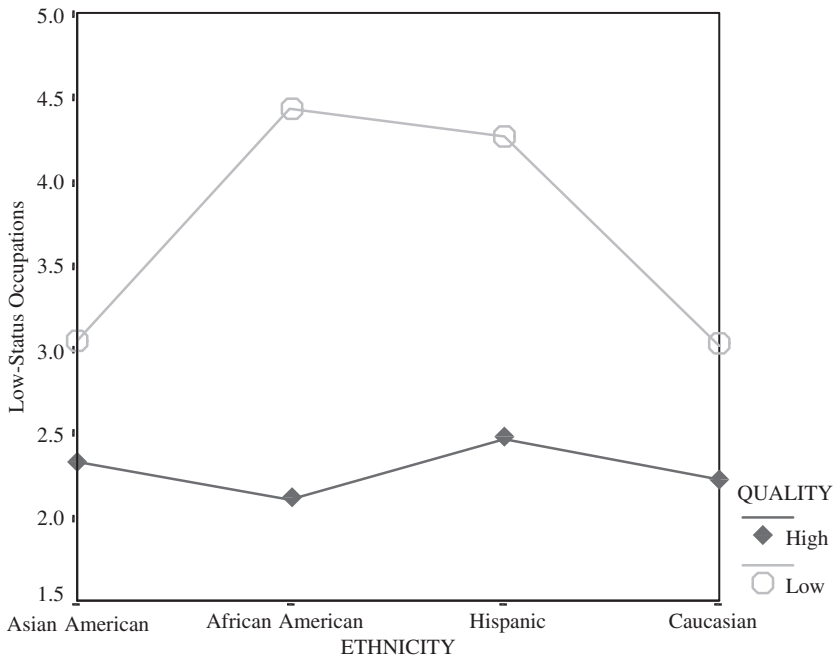


Figure 3. Low-status job suitability of targets as a function of race and résumé quality.

Mediation Analyses

In order to test the third hypothesis, we used participant ratings of applicants' suitability for low- and high-status occupations as covariates in an ANCOVA (see Baron & Kenny, 1986). It was expected that these occupational stereotypes would account for the relationship between race and overall evaluations such that the effect of race would no longer be significant after controlling for the effects of low- and high-status occupational suitability. The results of the ANCOVA show that both low- and high-status occupational suitability were significant covariates, $F(1, 146) = 7.78, p < .01$; and $F(1, 146) = 26.38, p < .01$, respectively.

Moreover, confirming the third hypothesis, the effect of race on overall evaluations did not approach significance after controlling for occupation stereotypes, $F(3, 146) = 0.27, p = .89$. Résumé quality remained a significant predictor, $F(1, 146) = 10.57, p < .01$, but the interaction between race and résumé quality was no longer significant, $F(3, 146) = 1.31, p = .28$. Taken together, these results confirm the hypotheses suggesting that occupational stereotypes account for the relationship between race and overall evaluations, but not for the relationship between résumé quality and overall evaluations.

Discussion

In the current study, strong effects of occupational stereotyping across racial groups emerged that accounted for discrimination toward Black and Hispanic individuals in selection decisions. These results fill an important gap in previous research that has neglected to incorporate multiple racial groups discrimination. By adopting a multiethnic approach to conducting research, we can understand discrimination and its contextual influences more broadly.

The current research reveals the importance of examining discrimination across multiple racial groups. It not only replicates past findings of differences between Black and White applicants, but also extends past research by demonstrating that Asian applicants are treated differently than are Black and Hispanic applicants. Moreover, the current research demonstrates that access discrimination can be accounted for by occupational stereotypes. Thus, this is the first study of which we are aware that directly assesses occupational stereotypes as a mechanism for discrimination across multiple ethnic groups. We now discuss each of the primary findings in detail.

First, as expected and consistent with past research, Black applicants were evaluated negatively, regardless of the quality of the résumé (i.e., even with strong credentials). Consistent with Shih's (2002) work, Black and Hispanic applicants were rated as more suitable than Asian and White ap-

plicants for low-status occupations. Despite recent strides in race relations, Black and Hispanic applicants were still judged more negatively than were Asian and White applicants.

These results can be explained by McConahay's (1986) modern racism theory. The theory proposes that racism against minority groups, particularly Black individuals, is still present, but is unrecognizable because it is more subtle than the traditional racism of the past. The beliefs that underlie modern racism against minorities include denial of continuing discrimination, antagonism toward minorities' demands, and resentment about special favors for minorities (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). So, while people may reject blatant forms of racism and racial stereotypes, they may continue to support a racist system unconsciously through their behavior, such as by devaluing the high credentials of racial minorities (Knight et al., in press).

Second, the findings demonstrate that Asian applicants tend to be perceived more positively than are Black and Hispanic applicants. For example, Asian applicants were rated as most suitable for high-status occupations and as least suitable for low-status occupations. This finding is not surprising, considering that Asian individuals are perceived to be a model minority (Ying et al., 2001). Asian individuals have the highest median household income in the United States (\$45,249), and most East Asian immigrants are well educated and are employed in professional occupations. Furthermore, many Asian immigrants have strong financial capabilities. Thus, because of their educational and financial accomplishments, particularly in comparison to Black and Hispanic individuals, Asian Americans have been dubbed the *model minority* (Ying et al., 2001). In turn, this has created stereotypes of Asian Americans as highly capable and successful (Cheryan & Boudenhansen, 2000).

The results indicate that these same stereotypes likely were triggered during the evaluation process, explaining why Asian American applicants were consistently rated favorably on both overall evaluation and high-status occupations, regardless of their résumé quality. In sum, the existence of discrimination against Black applicants was replicated in the current study. Furthermore, the findings with regard to Asian American and Hispanic applicants were consistent with past theory and research.

Finally, in addition to examining differences in access discrimination across multiple ethnic groups, a primary focus of this study was to examine the potential influence of occupational stereotypes in creating inequity in selection decisions. Thus, the current study contributes to a critical body of research by investigating occupational stereotypes as a potential explanatory mechanism. The results reveal that occupational stereotypes mediated the relationship between racial groups and overall evaluations. Specifically, when controlling for the perceived suitability of each applicant for high- and low-status jobs, the effects of race on the overall evaluation of the applicant

were no longer significant. This suggests that occupational stereotypes, operationalized as suitability for high- and low-status jobs, account for the relationship between ethnicity and applicant evaluations. These findings suggest that efforts to reduce persistent inequity in hiring decisions might be best served by targeting negative occupational stereotypes.

As with most field research, this study is not without limitations. For one, the study relied solely on White male participants. Although these participants were chosen to reflect the fact that White men are the primary organizational decision makers (Valian, 1998), continued diversification of the workforce most likely will be associated with increases in the representation of minority decision makers. Thus, future research should examine how minorities might evaluate other minorities. For example, it is important to investigate women and minority decision makers' evaluations of women and minority applicants. There is also evidence to suggest that findings that rely on "paper people" may not be applicable to real-life situations. Gorman, Clover, and Doherty (1978) investigated the external validity of the paper-people paradigm and concluded that accurate judgments and predictions about individuals cannot be made based on paper credentials alone.

Although the results of the study are meaningful, caution should be taken in their interpretation. The racial stereotypes that seemed to drive participants' evaluations of the applicants were, most likely, unintentional. In fact, there is evidence that trying to control stereotypical thoughts causes them to recur more forcibly (Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jetten, 1994). Future research might investigate whether rater training that is intended to increase awareness of this potential bias would mitigate the negative findings of the study. For example, mental control theory (Wegner, 1994) suggests that individuals are successful at controlling their thoughts, so applicant raters may suppress negative stereotypes of minorities when reviewing applications. Time pressure or cognitive busyness, however, can interfere with the goal of suppressing thoughts (e.g., stereotypes), as well as making individuals hypersensitive to the very thoughts they wish to suppress (Macrae et al., 1994). Therefore, future research might address whether instructing applicant raters to suppress negative stereotypes while reviewing applications indeed has negative consequences.

In spite of its limitations, the implications of the present study are relevant to all of the races that were examined. Asian Americans may take care not to let positive stereotypes about their ethnic group determine their level of effort in the occupational setting. Stereotypes might ensure them a positive first impression, but those stereotypes will not guarantee them success in the workplace. On the other hand, White and Hispanic individuals should be motivated to improve their credentials, since there was a large difference in evaluation as a result of résumé quality for both of these groups.

Finally, although both high- and low-quality Black applicants were rated negatively in this study, other research has shown that White employers do not discriminate against Black relative to White applicants when their qualifications are obviously strong or weak (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). Therefore, Black individuals should not be disheartened by the results of the current study and should strive to depict their good credentials on a résumé clearly. Although they might not be able to change their names, all applicants, regardless of race, might benefit from individuating themselves as much as possible to avoid being victims of racial stereotyping in the workplace.

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Appendix

1. How intelligent do you think this individual is?
2. How creative do you think this individual is?
3. How lazy do you think this individual is?
4. How friendly do you think this individual is?
5. How responsible do you think this individual is?
6. How competitive do you think this individual is?
7. How motivated do you think this individual is?
8. How likable do you think this individual is?
9. How ambitious do you think this individual is?
10. How likely would you want to work with this individual?
11. How likely would you see yourself working under this individual?
12. How likely would you offer this individual an interview?
13. How likely would you be to hire this individual?
14. How likely would you be to promote this individual within the first year?
15. How likely would you be to increase the salary of this individual within the first year?
16. How likely would this individual be to get a bonus his first year?