NAME-BASED DISCRIMINATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET: THE PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG SECOND-GENERATION IMMIGRANTS

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OBJECTIVE

This two-phase study posits second-generation immigrant job seekers as actors who not only possess knowledge about discriminatory hiring, but who reflexively apply this knowledge in navigating their symbolic interactions with prospective employers. The focus of this project is therefore on the social processes and relations through which this knowledge itself is produced and utilized by the second generation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do second-generation immigrants perceive the issue of name-based discrimination in the job market? What factors shape that perception?

- How do they navigate conflicts between identity, employment, ethics, membership, and marginality within the job market?

- What factors affect their decisions regarding the act of "resume whitening"?

METHODS/PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

Study 1: semi-structured in-depth interviews with 27 participants
Age range: 22-28 years
Gender: 19 females, 8 males

Study 2: online (open-ended) survey with 16 participants
Age range: 23-30 years
Gender: 13 females, 3 males

Location: cities across Southern Ontario
Education: completed at least one form of PSE
Employment status: either employed or actively searching for work
Ethno-racial background: combination of racialized and non-racialized individuals and a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds

FRAMEWORK

- Audit studies have drawn attention to the phenomenon of name-based discrimination, showing that those with "non-white" sounding names face a penalty in the job market (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Kang et al. 2016; Oreopoulos 2011).

- While we know that discriminatory hiring occurs, less is known about the perspectives and experiences of job applicants themselves.

- One exception to this is a recent study by Kang et al. (2016), which examines the phenomenon of "resume whitening." Resume whitening is a practice which involves removing any indicators or cues that may signal applicants' racial or ethnic background to employers (Kang et al. 2016). It generally takes two main forms:

  1. Altering the presentation of an applicant's name, and
  2. Removing or changing extra-curricular experiences that may signal applicants' ethno-racial identity to employers, and/or emphasizing experiences that signaled their conformity to the dominant "white culture."

- The experiences and perspectives of second-generation immigrants are of particular importance because their educational and occupational outcomes are critical to understanding the long-term integration of immigrants (Reitz and Bannerjee 2007).

- This project is informed by Kang et al.'s (2016) multi-method study, which uses Goffman's (1965) *Stigma* to discuss the ways individuals may conceal racially "stigmatizing" details about themselves on resumes as a means of "passing" as a member of the dominant group or of "covering" characteristics that might indicate their membership in a stigmatized (i.e. racialized) group (p. 3).

- It also draws upon the epistemology of feminist and critical race scholars (e.g. Collins 2000; Smith 1987, 1990) to direct the focus more critically toward the intersecting power relations endemic to name-based discrimination.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Preliminary findings highlight four key themes:

1. **Covert nature of name-based discrimination:** While some participants suspected that they had been a victim of this form of discrimination, they were rarely certain. Rather, name-based discrimination was almost always broached speculatively.

2. **Various sources of knowledge:** Nearly all participants expressed some level of awareness about the issue of name-based discrimination, regardless of whether or not they felt that they had personally experienced it. Their knowledge of this phenomenon was rooted in various sources, from academic studies, to conversations with friends, to their own personal experiences in their job search.

3. **The dilemma of resume whitening:** Participants were motivated to improve their employment prospects by engaging in whitening practices, but were also apprehensive about deceiving employers and undermining their ethno-racial identity. Under these circumstances, participants struggled to determine the appropriate balance between these two conflicting orientations.

4. **Questionable payoff of whitening tactics:** For those who did engage in whitening practices, the decision to do so did not always payoff. Those who got to the interview stage using a whitened name felt they had simply prolonged the discrimination they eventually faced at the interview.

The findings from this research demonstrate how racialized and second-generation individuals are neither ignorant nor passive in regard to name-based discrimination. Indeed, our respondents do not only possess a critical awareness about discriminatory hiring, they also reflexively apply this knowledge in navigating their interactions with prospective employers.

"It's a common experience where my other friends, who were not visible minorities, seem to get call-backs so much more often than I do. It doesn't seem to make sense that they receive more opportunities even though we possess the same qualifications, are coming from the same school, same degree, similar experiences... That makes me strongly suspect there must be something going on."
—Evelyn (Chinese, female, 24) [Study 2]

"Yeah, people would give me suggestions like on my resume to write Sara, instead of Saramathi, and I was like why? [...] That's not my name, and I'm not gonna change it."
– Saramathi (Sri Lankan, female, 22) [Study1]

"[It] makes me feel like I've succumbed to ingrained societal behaviour regarding the value of 'westernized culture' and devalu[ation] of all other cultures."
– Julie (Chinese, female, 24) [Study 2]

Covert Nature of Name-Based Discrimination

Sources of Knowledge

Dilemma of Resume Whitening

Payoff of Whitening Tactics

"My dad always says to shorten it to make it appear more white."
—Jacqueline (African-Canadian, female, 28) [Study 2]

"A career counsellor suggested I use a "Canadianized" version of my name."
—Vanja (Serbian, female, 30) [Study 2]

"The most recent interview I had, I didn't use my name at all, I just used a White name. [...] It was obvious he was expecting someone else and wanted to get me out of there as soon as possible. [...] I got through the written test, got the interview, but I just didn't get the second interview."
—Jameelah (Pakistani, female, 23) [Study 1]

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