Discrimination at the intersection of Age, Race, and Gender:

Evidence from a lab-in-the-field experiment

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Abstract: Although hiring discrimination has been found in many audit studies and laboratory experiments, little is known about how, why, and for whom this discrimination occurs. This paper combines the new technologies of resume randomization and eye-tracking within a laboratory setting to get a clearer picture of the mechanics of discrimination.

MBA, MPA, and human resources students were recruited to participate in a laboratory study. Each was shown 40 resumes with randomized inputs (work histories, education histories, addresses, etc.) for hypothetical high school graduate applicants to a clerical position which were rated them on a Likert (1-7) scale. They then choose two resumes for interview purposes. During this process of rating, their eye movements were tracked, showing where and for how long they looked at relevant portions of each resume.

We found strong evidence of (quadratic) age discrimination based on date of high school graduation as well as evidence for race discrimination based on names. We did not find direct evidence of gender discrimination, but gender interacts with race and age. Results on race*age are particularly striking, with black resumes starting at a lower level but eventually becoming preferred over white resumes for this entry-level job, while white resumes show the opposite pattern. These results highlight the importance of the intersection of group characteristics for fully understanding the labor market demand for different types of workers.

Participants spent longer times looking at young resumes compared to older resumes, and longer looking at white resumes compared to black resumes. However, participants spent longer looking at sections indicating volunteer work and computer experience for older resumes compared to younger. These results have implications for statistical discrimination and provide potential policy recommendations for changing the mechanics of resume screening.

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