



The Science of The Job Search, Part II: Racism, Outgroup Bias & KFC

“ I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they ***will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.*** — Martin Luther King, Jr.

Tomorrow is the end of Black History Month. In a few weeks, it'll be the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s death. **How much does race still matter in America?**

 racism-job-interviews-black-asian-hispanic.png

At least in hiring, **race (still) matters — a lot**. After analyzing thousands of job applications, outcomes and applicants, we discovered 3 key things:

1. **Non-white job applicants got 2.3x fewer interviews** than their white counterparts;
2. For non-white job applicants, if a **resume mistake reinforced a racist stereotype, it basically disqualified them**, e.g. African-Americans are lazy, Asian-Americans can't speak English;
3. On the other hand, very few people were *consciously* racist. When non-white applicants followed **specific tips (see below) that forced hiring managers to consider them objectively, they were given a 54% fairer chance.**

Let's break it down, shall we?

Non-White Applicants Are Less Hireable

It's hard out there for a black man. (And black women and Hispanic men and...)

Why? Two reasons (see below):

1. When a white person applied to a job, they had a 13.0% chance of hearing back, compared to 6.7% for Asian-Americans and **just 2.3% for African-Americans!**
2. When white applicants heard back, they heard back in 12.4 days, compared to 18.8 days for Hispanics and **41.2 days for African-Americans (nearly 6 weeks)!**

Ethnicity	% Interview Rate	# Days for Reply	p-value
Asian	6.7%	6.8	2.7e-2
Black	2.3%	41.2	8.7e-5
Hispanic	5.9%	18.8	4.0e-4
White	13.0%	12.4	2.2e-4

A common explanation for this sort of effect is that non-white job applicants have lower educational attainment, etc. We've omitted that analysis here for brevity but, in short, the effects here aren't explainable by education, work history, skills or geography, e.g. **African-American job applicants had nearly 37% more education** than their white counterparts. (President Obama was right...)


If you're a minority (and you're ever planning on looking for a job), this is pretty terrible news. What can you do about it?

Disqualifier: Don't Reinforce Racist Stereotypes!

When you look at the data, it becomes pretty clear that certain resume mistakes are basically disqualifiers for certain races. Those disqualifiers fit a general pattern: racist stereotypes.

Put another way, **if you in any way reinforce a pre-existing racial stereotype, you'll be punished for it.**

Check out the following graph, for instance:

 racial-discrimination-jobs-disqualifier-break-resume-etiquette.png

If you're from an immigrant family (or your name looks like it might be) and you make a resume faux pas, your chances drop precipitously.

#5: Asian-Americans: Dorks Who Can't Speak English *[100% PENALTY]*

Asian-Americans are awkward math dorks who can't speak English — that's the stereotype, right? Witness Engrish, Apu in the Simpsons, and this scene from the Big Short (one of my favorite movies):

If you're Asian-American, a resume mistake that *in any way* reinforces the English/bad communication skills stereotype can be a fatal mistake. Don't believe me? Check out this tweet a few weeks ago from Seattle:

“ Non-English speakers really have it hard bc my dad just got rejected from this job offer and the email literally stated “Let me tell you now, if you no speak English I will send you Home-“ Wtf.. + all of Bruce's emails we're also very unprofessional & passive aggressive pic.twitter.com/YDXNHVW7bH

— Emily Huynh 🌻 (@staleboba) January 23, 2018

Look at her dad's original email above. It's not great English, sure, but I've seen hundreds of applications like that from non-Asian applicants too. Do you think Bruce would reply like that to Chad?

Job Search Tip: **Especially if you're Asian- or Hispanic-American, make sure that you're not making a resume faux pas (100% penalty).**

(If you're worried about making an unintentional faux pas, **ApplicationAssistant** can automatically optimize dozens of variables for you, including writing personalized cover letters for each job application.)

#4: African-Americans: Lazy Welfare Queens **[PENALTY]**

This doesn't apply just to Asian- and Hispanic-Americans.

Let's talk about two people: **Tyrone Robinson, who got zero replies after ~4 months of job-hunting in SF, despite applying to 100+ jobs**; and, DeAndre Jackson, who got multiple offers after just 1 month of job hunting in Los Angeles. (Names and locations changed to protect the innocent.)

Consider Tyrone's work history:



Tyrone:

Marketing Assistant, Gap, 2015 – 2017

Sales Associate, Gap, 2014 – 2015

Sales Associate, Best Buy, 2013

Looks good, right? 5 years of work experience. Good career progression. So, why didn't he get the job?

Consider DeAndre, who had less experience but did just fine:



DeAndre:

Marketing Assistant, American Apparel, 2017 – Present

Marketing Assistant, Banana Republic, 2015 – 2017

Office Manager, Law Office, 2014 – 2015

What's the stereotype for African-Americans? They eat fried chicken, they're lazy and they're welfare queens. **If you're African-American, a resume mistake – no matter how small or innocent – that reinforces the lazy welfare queen stereotype will doom your job search.**

If you look at Tyrone's resume, you can see that he had **two unexplained gaps in work experience**. For any other person, it might not be great, but it would've been just fine. For Tyrone, it was a fatal (and 100% innocent) mistake. (He'd had to take care of his ailing mother.)

Resume Tip: **If you're African-American, make sure you explain (or remove) any gap** in work experience.

Explanation: Outgroup Bias and KFC

Here's the rub: *none of these resumes contained photos*. **Hiring managers could only infer an applicant's ethnicity based on their name.**

That split-second inference has tremendous (subconscious) power: a first impression (a home team jersey or how a name sounds) fires off millions of neurons in your brain, giving you dozens of working assumptions in a few hundred milliseconds – **it's what we call a "gut feeling" in everyday life.**

And it's important! We're bombarded by information everywhere we go and if we didn't have our gut feelings, we'd be sloppy, slippery puddles of anxiety on the floor. But, sometimes it goes awry.

Whenever someone seems foreign or unfamiliar to you, those gut reactions prepare you to be **skeptical and wary – in psychology, it's known as outgroup bias**. This made a ton of sense when we lived in warring clans in the Irish highlands or African savannah, but it's less helpful now that most (corporate) folks' biggest physical threat is a paper-cut.

In the couple seconds the average manager takes to review an average resume, outgroup bias means **Tyrone Robinson gets bucketed as a lazy, KFC-eating flake** and **Minh Huynh gets bucketed as an English-speaking dork** in a few hundred milliseconds. They never even had a (real) chance.

Sucks, right? But, it turns out there's hope—

Equalizer: Force an Objective Mindset

In general, **when hiring managers are reviewing your resume, you're operating at their subjective, subconscious "gut feeling" level.** And if you've got a name like Tyrone Robinson, Maria Torres or Minh Huynh, that means you're in trouble.

But, remember: **very few people are consciously racist.** What if instead of fighting the subconscious, you forced them to consider you consciously — objectively?

 racial-discrimination-level-playing-field-force-objective-mindset.png

Non-white job applicants saw up to **+199% higher interview rates when they forced hiring managers to consider them objectively.** This roughly translated to closing the racial discrimination gap in hiring by 54% (a 1.6x race penalty vs. 2.3x originally).

So, how do you force hiring managers to consider you objectively? In addition to not breaking resume etiquette, you need to **follow at least two of the resume tips below:**

#3: Use Concrete Numbers **[+23% BOOST]**

As we mentioned last time, **every 3 sentences, use at least 1 number to demonstrate your (concrete) impact.** Between the two people below, who would you hire?

“ Helped increase sales by 31% by working with Operations Manager to reduce time to 1st customer reply.

Collaborated with Operations Manager improve customer reply times.

The first one is better than the second for **everyone.** But, if Chad and Tyrone both say the second, Chad is **always** going to win.

Resume Tip: Especially for people of color, **quantifying the impact that you made with numbers helps remove subjective bias (+23% boost).**

#2: Add Industry Buzzwords **[+34% BOOST]**

Also as last time, **add 15-20 specific skills, industry buzzwords, acronyms, etc. to your resume.** Although it's helpful for everyone, it's especially helpful for minorities to anchor their expertise in objectively-known and -respected foundations.

Resume Tip: Include 15-20 specific skills, industry buzzwords and expertise in your job achievements (+34% boost).

#1: Don't Be a "Team Player" [+63% BOOST]

Finally, don't be a "team player". Don't mention these sorts of collaboration-oriented words more than once or twice in your resume:

“ team player
results-driven collaborator
supporting member
assisted
collaborated
helped

Why? These sorts of words discount your achievements to hiring managers. Saying it once conveys that you work well in teams. Saying it five times screams, "I don't know how to get anything done individually." **If you're a person of color, hiring managers are already (subconsciously) discounting your achievements — don't help them.**

(Quite frankly, this is a lot like the problem that many women face in the workplace. More on that in a post next month. In the meantime, check out #banbossy.)

Resume Tip: For people of color, **being explicit about your specific contributions is crucial to remove subjective bias (+63% boost).**

(Given the different variables to balance, this one's a bit tricky. Our **ResumeOptimizer can automatically suggest corrections for teamwork cliches** and other common mistakes.)

Summary

To recap:

- Race (still) matters, a lot — **non-white job applicants were 2.3x less hireable** than white job applicants.
- If you (in any way) **reinforce a pre-existing racist stereotype, outgroup bias will cause hiring managers to instantly disqualify you**, e.g. African-Americans are lazy welfare queens, Asian-Americans are dorks who can't speak English.
- On the other hand, **if you forced hiring managers to consider you objectively, they gave you a 70% fairer chance**. For example: demonstrating personal achievements, concrete skills, quantified impact.

As with everything involving race, you're playing on a knife's edge here: do too little and you're nothing, do too much and you're labeled try-hard (or worse, blackballed). You have to do the right thing in exactly the right amount. Balancing the hundreds of variables that go into this is hard, for humans.

But, it's easy for robots: our AI-driven systems can simultaneously optimize 1,000+ variables. We're just getting started with these sorts of discrimination-related hiring issues, but our existing tools can already help a lot:

- **ApplicationAssistant automatically identifies jobs you're *objectively* qualified for**, so you can emphasize your objective qualifications and mitigate subconscious racism/outgroup bias; and,
- **ResumeOptimizer instantly scans your resume for dozens of potential issues putting you at a disadvantage, including** the three objective-mindset tips above.

In addition, our TalentAdvocates have helped people of every ethnicity and background navigate the especially complex, confusing, frustrating job search landscape that minorities face. Let us help.

Methodology

We used the core dataset, analysis and visualization from The Science of the Job Search, Part I.

To calculate which resume tips were disqualifiers, we looked only at non-white subgroups and filtered for tips where their **absence** resulted in a <5% interview rate. For equalizers, we filtered for tips where their **presence** resulted in an interview rate within 2 standard errors of the overall mean. The above graphs are plotted with bokeh on Python.

Why Are We Doing This?

With ApplicationAssistant right now, we **can boost the average job-seeker's hireability by 5.8x**. But, what makes ApplicationAssistant work has been an internal company secret until now. We're fundamentally a mission-driven company and we believe we can help **more** people by sharing our learnings. So, that's exactly what we're going to do.

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About the Author

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Mission-driven entrepreneur, world traveler (400K+ miles), dad to 100-pound German Shepherd. My #1 mission: To help you get the job you deserve.
