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Author: **Devah Pager and Bruce Western**

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National Institute of Justice Grant: Final Report

Title: Investigating Prisoner Reentry: The Impact of Conviction Status on the Employment Prospects of Young Men

Principle Investigators: Devah Pager and Bruce Western

Abstract:
Our research addresses the problem of prisoner reentry by focusing on the employment of ex-offenders shortly after release. We completed a three-part project to study the employment barriers facing men with criminal records. The empirical core of the project is a randomized field experiment that sent matched teams of testers to apply for hundreds of entry-level jobs in New York City. The experiment observed how employers respond to applicants who are equally qualified but vary by race, ethnicity, and criminal record. Because the research design allowed us to finely control characteristics of job seekers, and randomly assign criminal records and job openings, the experimental data yields unusually clear and convincing evidence of the impact of a criminal record. The audit study alone would provide a powerful method for studying the employment barriers to ex-offenders, but it is complemented here by a telephone survey of the same employers, and in-depth qualitative interviews with an additional subset. Combining experimental measures with interview data offers a unique opportunity to study the hiring process from both the job seeker's and the employer's point of view. Policies supporting prisoner reentry and ex-offender employment are directly informed by the rich data resulting from our multi-stage investigation.

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The Impact of Conviction Status on the Employment Prospects of Young Men

As record numbers of young men leave prisons, nearly 700,000 this year alone, the question of prisoner reentry has become a pressing concern. In particular, the employment outcomes of ex-offenders represents a critical issue, given the connections between stable work and desistance from crime (Uggen, 2000). Unfortunately, current statistics do not present an optimistic picture. Surveys of former inmates suggest that 60 to 75 percent remain jobless up to a year after release (Travis, 2005; Petersilia, 2003). In light of these outcomes, the fact that nearly half return to prison within three years is of little surprise (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002).

Adding to the general problems of prisoner reentry, the question of race presents additional complexities in the reentry process. Blacks now represent over 40 percent of the prison population (relative to just 12 percent of the general population), and are likewise significantly overrepresented among reentering inmates. In addition to higher rates of criminal records among African Americans, some evidence suggests that black ex-offenders may also pay a higher penalty for having a criminal record relative to otherwise similar whites (Pager, 2007). Given these patterns, understanding the nature of criminal and racial stigma—and the combination of the two—represents and important goal for research and policy.

In this report we present the results of a two-part study investigating the barriers of race and criminal background in access to low wage labor markets. The first stage of our research involved a large-scale field experiment in which we sent teams of trained young men to apply for entry-level jobs, varying only according to their race and criminal background. The field experiment was then followed by survey interviews and in-depth interviews with the same employers to provide more detailed information about their businesses and their concerns about hiring applicants with criminal records. This multi-method approach provides a richer perspective on the process through which employers express and enact their preferences. The

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experimental design allows us to isolate the causal influence of a criminal record, apart from the many possible sources of spuriousness; the survey methods allow us to compare our findings with traditional measures of employer behavior; and the in-depth interviews allow us to investigate the meanings employers place on conviction status as a signal of employability. In the remainder of this report, we discuss the central findings of this research and their implications for policy on prisoner reentry and ex-offender employment.

Stage I: Hiring Experiment

The New York City Hiring Discrimination Study sent matched teams of testers to apply for hundreds of real entry-level jobs throughout New York City over nine months in 2004. The testers were well-spoken, clean-shaven young men, aged 22 to 26. Most were college-educated, between 5 feet 10 inches and 6 feet in height, recruited in and around New York City. They were matched on the basis of their verbal skills, interactional styles (level of eye-contact, demeanor, and verbosity), and physical attractiveness. Testers were assigned fictitious resumes indicating identical educational attainment, and comparable quality of high school, work experience (quantity and kind), and neighborhood of residence. Resumes were prepared in different fonts and formats and randomly varied across testers, with each resume used by testers from each race group. Testers presented themselves as high school graduates with steady work experience in entry-level jobs. Finally, the testers passed through a common training program to ensure uniform behavior in job interviews. While in the field, the testers dressed similarly and communicated with teammates by cell phone to anticipate unusual interview situations.

For the study as a whole, the ten testers were randomly assigned (and rotated) across four teams, each consisting of two or three people. In this report, we focus on the results related to the

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effects of a criminal record on the labor market outcomes of young black and white men.[1] The teams for this part of the study each consisted of two testers of the same race; one team included two white testers, the second team included two black testers. In both teams, one tester was randomly assigned a "criminal record" for the first audit; the criminal record condition then alternated between testers for each successive employment search. Thus each tester served in the criminal record condition for an equal number of cases. By randomly allocating criminal records to testers, unmeasured differences between testers were effectively controlled. None of the testers in the study had real criminal backgrounds, but presented fictitious criminal record information to employers for the purposes of the study. The criminal record was typically disclosed in answer to the standard question on employment applications, "Have you ever been convicted of a crime? If yes, please explain." When asked, testers were instructed to reveal that they had recently been released from prison after serving 18 months for a drug felony (possession with intent to distribute, cocaine). In addition, following Pager (2003), the white tester's criminal record was additionally signaled on the resume by listing work experience at a state prison, and by listing a parole officer as a reference.[2]

Employers were sampled from job listings for entry-level positions, defined as jobs requiring no previous experience and no education greater than high school. Job titles included restaurant jobs, retail sales, warehouse work, couriers, telemarketers, customer service positions, clerical workers, stockers, movers, delivery drivers, and a wide range of other low wage positions. Job listings were randomly drawn each week from the classified sections of *The New York Times*, *The Daily News*, *The New York Post*, *The Village Voice,* and *Craigslist*. The broad

[1] A second major focus of the study was on measuring the prevalence of direct racial discrimination. Results from this part of the study appear in Pager, Western, and Bonikowski (forthcoming). For this grant, we focus primarily on outcomes relevant to the employment of ex-offenders.

[2] Results from Pager (2003) suggest that providing information about a criminal record to employers who do not request the information does little to affect hiring decisions. Those employers who request the information are those most likely to use it.

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range of job listings allows for comprehensive coverage of the entry-level labor market in New York. From the available population of job listings, we took a simple random sample of advertisements each week (n = 250). Testers in each team applied to each job within a 24-hour period, randomly varying the order of the applicants.

Our dependent variable recorded any positive response in which a tester was either offered a job or called back for a second interview. Callbacks were recorded by voicemail boxes set up for each tester. For more information about the research design and methods, see Pager, Western, and Bonikowski, forthcoming.

Results

Two key findings emerge from the first set of audit results. First, not surprisingly, a criminal record has a significant negative impact on hiring outcomes, even for applicants with otherwise appealing characteristics. Across teams, a criminal record reduced the likelihood of a callback or job offer by nearly 50 percent (28% vs 15%). Second, evidence from our tester teams suggests that the negative effect of a criminal conviction is substantially larger for blacks than for whites. As shown in Figure 1, the criminal record penalty suffered by white applicants (30%) is roughly half the size of the penalty for blacks with a record (60%). The interaction between race and criminal record in these data is large and statistically significant indicating that the penalty of a criminal record is more disabling for black job seekers than whites.

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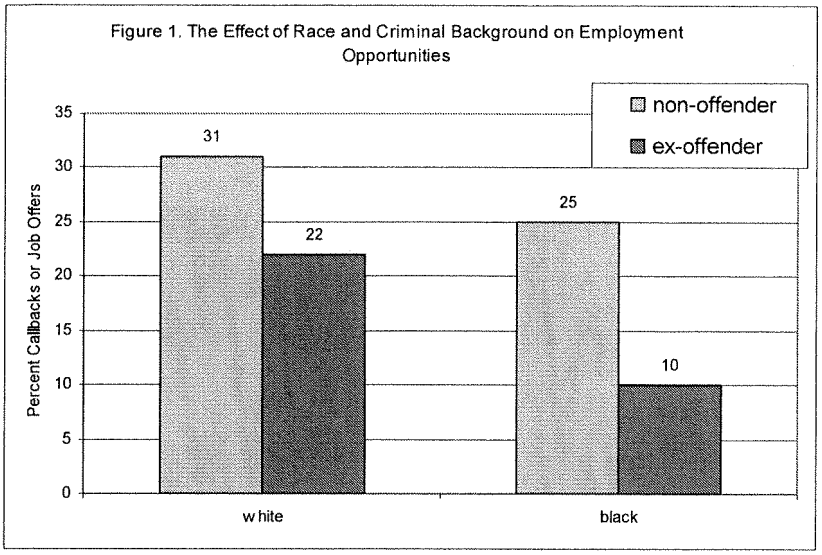

The intensification of the criminal record effect among blacks is consistent with earlier audit research (Pager, 2007), and points to special barriers facing blacks in the transition from prison to work. Employers, already reluctant to hire blacks, appear particularly wary of blacks with known criminal histories. In seeking to better understand the interaction between race and criminal background in shaping labor market outcomes, we looked to the sequence of interactions that lead to this ultimate pattern of results. As job applicants pass from the point of application to an interview, and from an interview to an offer, we witness some of the underlying dynamics that may shape employers' decision making and result in the systematic disadvantage of blacks with criminal records. In particular, we see ways in which opportunities for rapport-building appear to mediate the effects of race and criminal background on hiring outcomes.

The Importance of Personal Contact

One of the ways job applicants can build rapport with employers is through the interview process. Though typically brief for low wage jobs, interviews provide an opportunity for applicants to demonstrate their communication skills and their commitment to work. For employers concerned about soft skills not reflected on a resume, even a quick interaction can

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provide important information about the capacity of an individual applicant. Especially in the case of stigmatized applicants, personal contact may serve a particularly important purpose as a way of counteracting employers' initial stereotypes. As employers learn more about the person behind the category (e.g., ex-offender, black man), their comfort level with the applicant in question is likely to increase.

As our testers passed from the point of application to an interview, and from an interview to an offer, we witnessed some of the underlying dynamics that may shape employers' decision-making and result in the systematic disadvantage of blacks with criminal records. Indeed we find evidence that personal contact with an employer has a substantial impact on hiring outcomes. Testers who interacted with employers were nearly six times more likely to receive a callback or job offer relative to those who did not.[3] At the same time, it appears that this pathway to rapport-building may not be equally available to all applicant types. Though all testers in the study were instructed to request to speak to the person in charge of hiring and to proceed as far as they could in the interview process during their visit, some met with more success than others. In particular, race has a significant effect on the likelihood of personal contact between applicant and employer, with blacks roughly 40 percent less likely to have the opportunity to interact with employers ($p<.001$). Employers appear to be screening on the basis of race in deciding who to allow to proceed from application to interview (see Figure 2).

[3] Results from a logistic regression predicting a positive response as a function of race, criminal record, an interaction between the two, and a dummy variable for personal contact with employer. Models control for clustering on employer.

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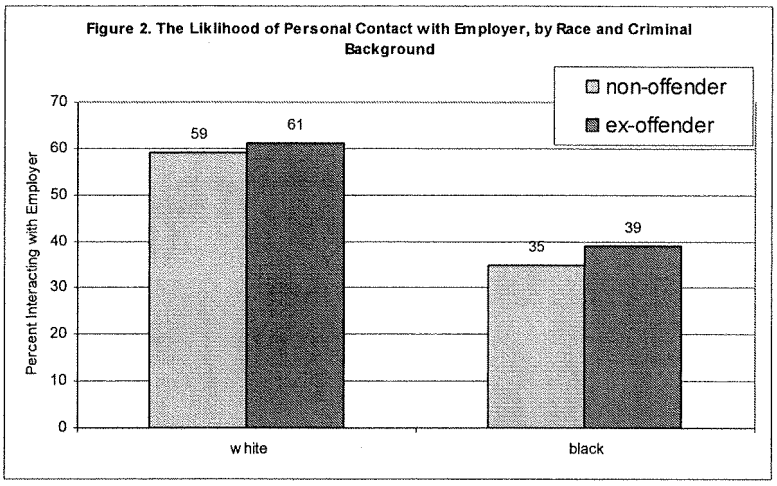

By contrast, the effect of a criminal record has no discernable impact on the likelihood of interaction. Given that a criminal record is typically unobserved until an employer has spoken with the candidate and/or reviewed their materials, it is not surprising that this is not typically the basis of an employer's decision to interview.

The barriers that emerge in this very early stage of the hiring process are no doubt consequential for the ultimate disparities we observe. With fewer opportunities for face to face contact with employers, black applicants were limited in their ability to demonstrate their specific skills and attributes. Particularly in the case of black ex-offenders, for whom employers' concerns were likely to be particularly strong, limits on interaction reduced opportunities to contextualize the conviction or to demonstrate evidence of successful rehabilitation.

Quality of the Interaction

Being granted an interview, or even a conversation, with the person in charge of hiring provides an important opportunity for establishing rapport. But the nature of that rapport also hinges upon what takes place during the interaction. Particularly for applicants with criminal records, the interview provides a key opportunity to assuage employers' concerns. In this respect, our testers had mixed experiences. The testers had a set script that they were instructed to convey to

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employers about their prior drug conviction and their commitment to rehabilitation. In some cases employers were extremely receptive to discussing these issues, while in others employers seemed uncomfortable or unwilling to broach the subject. In one interaction, for example, an employer inquired about the most recent job listed on Kevin's resumé, which was at a correctional facility. Kevin reports, "*I thought she was asking me what I did to get in there. I said, 'It was for drug possession.' She said, 'No, not that. That's none of my business.'*" The employer then quickly moved on to discuss Kevin's previous work experience. It is unclear from this interaction what lingering doubts the employer may have had about Kevin's criminal background, but Kevin does not have the chance to explain further.

In another case, Anthony, an African American tester, reports, "*As she looked over [my resumé] I could barely hear her say, 'Oh, I see.' I don't know what it was in response to, but it was pretty quick so I would guess it was my conviction... She then just looked up at me and said, 'I'll give you a call.' It seemed like she ended it a bit abruptly.*" Some employers seemed uncertain about what was legally or socially appropriate to ask about prior convictions, and others seemed simply uncomfortable with the topic or considered it outside of the realm of employment-related concerns. In these cases, it is difficult to interpret the employers' response to the criminal background, and the applicant typically has less opportunity to account for the stigmatizing record or address employers' underlying concerns.

In other cases, employers' concerns about the criminal record are more transparent. Worries about legal liability, for example, came up in this interview with Chad, an African American tester:

> *When I finished the application I was interviewed by...a large white man with a thick mustache. He shook my hand, invited me to have a seat, and began to look over my resumé. He said, "First, I need you to explain this...correctional facility and parole officer reference." I told him that I was convicted of a drug charge -- possession with intent to sell. "I can't hire you," he said. He went on to explain that a lot of things can happen and the liability is too great. He said, "Let's say you got into a fight with a guy*

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> *and you were in the right. The police come and run your background, yes, now you're in the wrong, even though you may have been right. It wouldn't be good for you and it wouldn't be good for us. I couldn't hire you."*

Sometimes, employers' negative reactions are less explicit, but their concern over the prospect of hiring an ex-offender is clear nevertheless. For example, Kevin, a white tester, reports his experience at a specialty foods store:

> *"I noticed a sign on the door which read, 'Help wanted, part time, some experience'.... A few minutes later a man came out.... He told me that he had a great Part Time position [and] there could be some full time positions opening [in] a while. He pointed at my response for reasons for leaving on the application right next to [the correctional facility] and said, 'Why did you write parole?' I said that I was currently on parole. [He] then looked me in the eye and said, 'Did you commit a crime?' I said yes. He then looked down at the sheet and said that he really wasn't hiring right now...."*

Kevin's conviction record seemed to catch the employer by surprise. Within seconds, the many signals pointing to a job opportunity (help wanted sign, "great part time positions," etc.) disappeared, as the employer decided he was no longer hiring, or at least not hiring Kevin.

Despite these unpleasant experiences, not all employers reacted negatively upon noticing a criminal record. In fact, on a number of occasions, testers encountered extremely sympathetic employers. For example, Kevin records his experience in applying for a job at a car dealership:

> *"He saw the correctional facility [on my resumé] and said, 'We're an Equal Opportunity Employer. We don't care about this. About 75% of the people in this business have a record anyway....'"*

Kevin describes the end of the interview:

> *"He said he was going to call me. Then he said, 'I know what you are thinking. This asshole is never going to call me. I will call you. Not because you have good sales experience but just because you need a chance.'"*

This employer appears extremely sympathetic to the plight of an ex-offender looking for work. In fact, the employer seems willing to privilege the desire to give Kevin a second chance over his need for workers with relevant experience. Indeed, this employer called Kevin about the job two days later.

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To be sure, many of the sympathetic responses received by testers in the criminal record condition simply reflect the preexisting attitudes of employers, independent of the interaction. Employers who feel sympathetic toward ex-offenders are likely to express such sympathies in conversations with ex-offender applicants. But above and beyond employers' predispositions, we observe some evidence that the interaction itself can work to clarify and shape the employers' interpretation of the criminal record. For employers who have ambivalent feelings about hiring ex-offenders, or who have anxieties about particular kinds of ex-offenders, interaction with the candidate allows the employer to interrogate these concerns directly. In one case, for example, Keith, a white tester, has an extended conversation with the manager at a furniture rental store:

> *After finishing the application I brought it back to [the employer], along with my resumé. He invited me to take off my backpack and have a seat. He began looking over the res./app. and his first question was, 'Were you selling or using?' I told him, 'Using. It was a minor thing. A stupid mistake and I'm now clean.' He was sympathetic saying, 'I gotcha. It was a question, not a criticism.' [The employer then asked him a few questions about his driver's license and driving history.] He invited me to sit with him out at the door while he smoked. When we got there he informally sat me down and lit up. He turned to me and said, 'So why should I hire you instead of one of the 47 other guys I got coming to me?' I told him, 'I'll work hard for you, bust my ass. It's a condition of my parole that I work.' He said, 'But do you want to work?' I answered, 'Yeah, I'm looking to get back into society...' He interrupted, 'You want to get your shit together.' 'Yeah,' I said. ...The conversation ended with him saying, 'My inclination is to say yes,' (regarding hiring me). He added, 'My bosses, the owners, are a little more close-minded than me.... Look, you paid, you don't have to pay for it the rest of your fucking life. People make mistakes. I'll get you my card.'*

This employer expresses some open-mindedness about Keith's criminal background from the start ("It was a question, not a criticism"), but he also wants evidence that taking a chance on Keith would be warranted amidst the large pool of other candidates. The conversation appears to provide important reassurances to the employer, who ends the interview with an encouraging note.

In another case, Anthony, an African American tester, discusses his criminal background with the manager of a healthcare company:

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"[The employer] said, '*I'm sure people must take double-takes [when they see the correctional facility].*' I replied, '*Yeah, that does happen sometimes.*' He told me that he knows the law, says I have to provide that information to a possible employer, but not to worry because he has had other employees who have '*fucked up in the past.*' He said, *'I feel safer knowing you're telling me up front than me having to wonder if you're gonna come here and tear shit up. Let's face it, interviews are bullshit. You can't know someone from a 5-minute interview. So let's cut to the chase.'*

- '*How long were you in?*' (18 months)
- '*When'd you get out?*' (A few weeks ago)
- '*Ok, so you're fresh out and trying to get back on track?*' (Yes, I am)
- '*What'd you do?*' (I had a small amount of drugs on me)
- '*So you were guilty?*' (Yes, I was young and made some mistakes but I learned from them and am completely drug-free)
- (jokingly) '*So you weren't innocent?*' (No, it was my fault.)
- '*Don't worry, I find that those that messed up and want to set things right are better workers.*'

In this interaction the employer does acknowledge certain concerns about hiring someone with a record, but seems to respond favorably to Anthony's honesty, and after learning more of the details of Anthony's background, offers him an encouraging response.

Thus, while a criminal record does have a significant negative impact on the employment prospects of job seekers, some employers are willing to look beyond the conviction, or to downplay its significance in the context of other information they acquire during the interview. In these cases, a kind of empathy seems to develop between employer and job seeker, with goodwill often translating into a substantial improvement in employment prospects. Of course the types of individualizing information employers look to are not always in the applicants' control. Race and ethnicity, in particular, appear to affect some employers' interpretations of the seriousness of the criminal background and the depth of empathy generated by the interaction.

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For example, Keith, a white tester, reports on his interaction with the manager of a restaurant supply company:

> *[The employer] sat me down and went over my application and resumé. He first saw [the correctional facility] and asked about my working there. I told him that I had been incarcerated. In a lower voice he said, "What did you do?" I told him about my being caught with cocaine, my time served, my current sobriety, which my parole officer could verify, the fact that it was a mistake and I had learned my lesson. At this point he said, "Zarriello...what is that, Italian?" I said, "Yes," and could immediately tell he was now on my side. He asked more questions like, "What happened exactly?" I told him I was in a car with some ex-friends that was pulled over and we were all searched and they found 6 grams in my possession. He asked, "You come from a nice Italian family? What do your parents think about this?" I told him they were disappointed but thought I had learned my lesson. He told me that "people make mistakes." He went on to say, "It would make me feel good to help a guy like you, more than just the rewards of doing my job, but good as a person if I can help someone."*

This employer's emphasis on the value of second chances and the desire to help a young ex-offender get back on his feet are similar to sympathetic reactions we heard from other employers in interactions with both black and white testers. Here, though, we see the employer explicitly invoke Keith's ethnic background as the basis for solidarity, and as a key turning point in the employer's reaction to the criminal background information, as Keith moves from being viewed as an ex-offender to someone from a "nice Italian family."

In a similar case, Kevin applied for a job with a staffing agency and was asked a number of detailed questions about his criminal history. Toward the end of the interview Kevin reports,

> *"[The employer] said, 'Do you have Irish in you?' I said, 'On my mother's side I do.' He asked what else I have. I said, 'French.' He was delighted! He said he has Irish and French in him, too. He said we could be related because we are both from FrIreland (France & Ireland). I said yes and laughed with him."* Kevin concluded his report by offering his impression of the interaction: "*He really wanted to help me out and seemed to be going to great lengths to find me a job.*"

Once again, the ethnic solidarity expressed in this interaction appears to help establish a positive rapport between candidate and employer. Conversations with employers thus simultaneously offer the opportunity to present personalizing information about the applicant's work ethic and commitment to rehabilitation, but may also generate new bases for categorical distinctions.

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Employers thus appear to offer a range of reactions to ex-offender applicants, varying in terms of employers' comfort level in discussing criminal backgrounds and their evaluative assessments of this information. To examine employers' responses more systematically, we coded tester interactions with employers according to the nature of their response to the criminal record information, based on narrative data provided by the testers. Focusing on testers with criminal records who had personal contact with employers (roughly 50% of all tests), we code responses as: ambiguous or no response, negative response, and sympathetic response.

Looking to the results in Figure 3, we see that overall employers are most likely to avoid talking about the conviction altogether. Between two-thirds and three-quarters of employers either avoided the subject of the criminal record altogether or gave little indication of how they viewed the information. By contrast, less than 10 percent of employers made explicitly negative comments. Though the hiring outcomes from the audit study indicate a large negative impact of a criminal record on employers' evaluations, we see little of this reflected in their explicit comments to job applicants. If expressing a clear valence, employers were more likely to offer sympathetic reactions, with roughly 20 percent of employers coded as sympathetic toward the ex-offender applicant. We see some evidence that blacks were less likely to have a clear reaction from employers about their criminal background (73 vs 67%), more likely to receive a negative response (8% vs 5%) and less likely to receive a sympathetic response (19 vs 29%), though these differences are not statistically significant.

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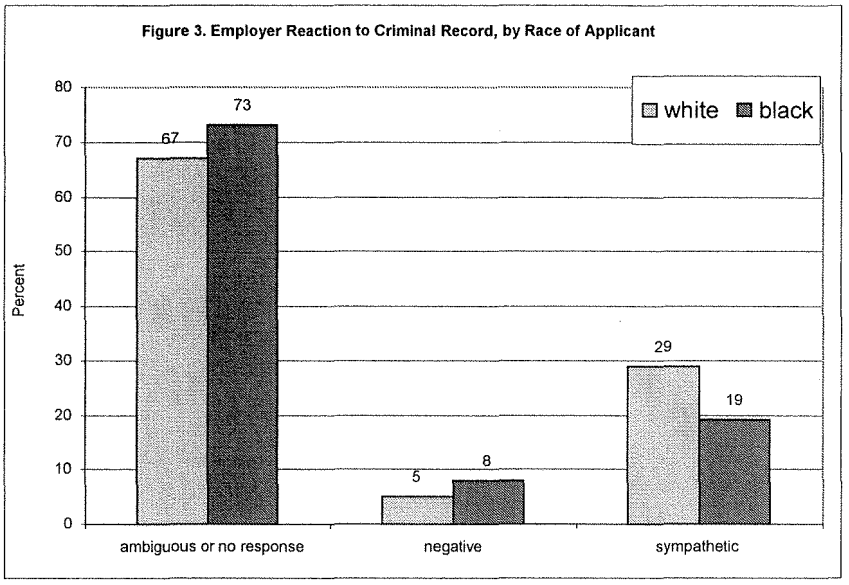

Note: Includes those testers in the criminal record condition who interacted with the employer (n=144)

Overall, these results point to a reluctance among employers to address the criminal record issue head on, or to reveal their reaction to the record to the applicant in question. Our final question, then, considers the extent to which these differential responses in interaction correspond to differences in hiring outcomes.

Relationship between Type of Interaction and Employment Outcomes

The nature of interaction between employer and applicant is significant only if it proves consequential for ultimate hiring outcomes. Matching interaction experiences with employment outcomes can provide some leverage on the pathways through which ex-offenders find opportunity. Figure 4 presents the percent of applicants with criminal records who received a callback or job offer, by race of the applicant and type of employer response. Not surprisingly, employment outcomes are most favorable among those who received a sympathetic response from employers. These employers were not simply paying lip service to the value of second chances, but demonstrated an actual willingness to hire ex-offenders. Among those who

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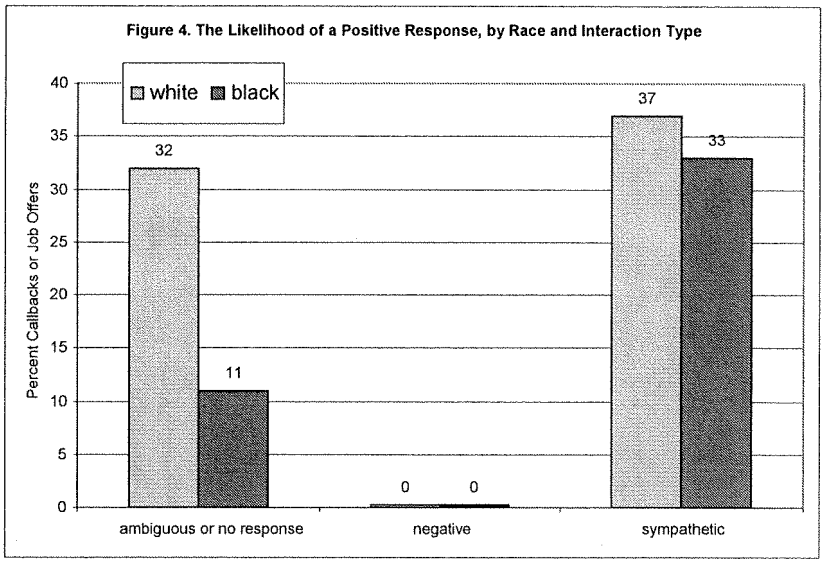
received sympathetic responses from employers, whites were slightly more likely to receive an actual callback or job offer (37 vs 33%), though this difference is not statistically significant.

Showing even more consistency between interactions and outcomes, employers who expressed negative reactions to applicants with criminal records in no cases made offers or callbacks to these applicants.



Note: Includes those testers in the criminal record condition who interacted with the employer (n=144)

The group with less consistent results includes those employers who offered no reaction or ambiguous reactions to the criminal background. Among these employers, we see a large racial difference in employment outcomes with white applicants roughly three times more likely to receive a callback or job offer relative to blacks who had similar encounters (32 vs 11%). Note that outcomes for whites differed little for those who received ambiguous or no response and those who received a sympathetic response (32 vs 37%). Outcomes for blacks, by contrast, are quite different (11 vs 33%). Though it is not possible to directly interpret employers' underlying reactions, this evidence is consistent with the role of stereotypes inhibiting the acquisition and impact of individuating information. If employers who were concerned about the record among

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black applicants chose to remain silent about the issue, the applicant would then have little opportunity to anticipate or address the employer's concerns. Where for white ex-offenders this reduced communication does not appear to have much of an impact, black ex-offenders seem to face significantly lower employment prospects as a result.

Conclusion to Stage One

The results of this study show a strong reluctance among employers to hire applicants with criminal records, and especially so when considering black ex-offenders. What is perhaps more noteworthy in these data relates to the cases in which testers with criminal backgrounds *were* given a chance at employment. Employment prospects improve significantly for applicants who have a chance to interact with the hiring manager, and more so among those who elicit sympathetic responses in the course of those interactions. To be sure, some of this variation is attributable to characteristics and preferences of the employers alone, with little or no effect of personal contact. Employers who are eager to hire will be more likely to meet with applicants on the spot, and those who are sympathetic toward ex-offenders will be more likely to express such sentiments in the course of interaction. At the same time, we suspect that the interaction itself plays a non-trivial role in this hiring process. Employers have many reasons to be concerned about applicants with prior histories of incarceration. Concerns about theft, violence, and drug use are each relevant, not to mention the more mundane concerns over worker reliability and performance. Personal contact with an applicant cannot reveal all of these issues, but can help to provide some signals as to the disposition of the applicant, and can help the employer to develop a "gut feeling" about whether or not this individual is likely to diverge from the stereotype of the ex-con.

Unfortunately, the ability to have such a hearing does not appear available to all applicants. Blacks were significantly less likely to be invited to interview by employers, offering

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them fewer opportunities to present indicators at odds with their stigmatized group membership. Further, though the distribution of reactions from employers was roughly similar among black and white applicants with criminal backgrounds, actual employment outcomes differed for those who had little opportunity to discuss their criminal record: Among whites, these limited interactions did little to affect ultimate hiring outcomes, whereas for blacks positive responses appeared substantially reduced.

The importance of rapport-building in the employment process, particularly for applicants with stigmatizing characteristics, points to some important policy implications. Initiatives that facilitate the matching of workers with employers in ways that help to overcome these initial barriers may have a substantial impact. Intermediary organizations, for example, which develop relationships with employers willing to hiring ex-offenders and help them to train, screen, and place workers represents one important policy approach to bridging this divide.

Overall these findings suggest the importance of promoting social interaction with employers to encourage employment among workers with criminal records. Because of the large racial disparity in criminal convictions, job applicants with criminal background depend more on building rapport with prospective employers but are less likely to be given the opportunity because of their race. Policy intervention should aim to defuse stigma and provide employers with more information about their prospective workers. Job referral services that act as labor market intermediaries who vouch for job applicants might reduce the anonymous interaction of the low-wage labor market. Certificates of rehabilitation and public education campaigns might also weaken the effects of stereotyping.

As incarceration rates have increased over the last few decades, official criminality compounds the stigma of race and deepens of the economic disadvantage of young African American men. Instead of just adding to the deficits of low-skill black men, a criminal record

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modifies the effect of racial discrimination, raising the bar to employment higher for blacks than similarly-situated whites. In this context, we can understand the growth of incarceration rates, and the racial disparities that characterize them, as producing an institutional racism with wide-reaching economic effects.

Stage Two: An Employer's Perspective

The audit study allows us to tell the story of the employment process from the job seeker's perspective. We can monitor the applicant's experiences at each stage of the hiring process, ultimately observing his 'success' or 'failure' in securing employment opportunities. By recording the differential outcomes of matched pairs of applicants, we can make inferences about employer preferences for particular worker characteristics; in particular, assessing the degree to which race and a criminal record represent important signals to employers in their evaluation of entry-level job candidates. And yet, we still know little about exactly how these signals work—what is the content of the signal that provides "useful" information to employers. A job applicant's criminal record may signal dangerousness, unreliability, or a variety of other unappealing characteristics yet we have little precise idea about employers' specific concerns. In order to unpack the meanings underlying employers' decisions, we turn our focus next to the employers themselves. By gathering insight into the structural and attitudinal factors that shape hiring outcomes, we can better understand the decision-making process that leads to the behavioral outcomes we observe. The dual perspectives afforded by this design—that of the job seeker and the employer—offer an innovative way to view the employment exchange.

In the second phase of this research, we conducted both a telephone survey and in-depth interviews with the same employers who participated in the audit study. All employers from the audit study sample were included for contact in the telephone survey, yielding a final sample of

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385 employers (a response rate of 44%). On the survey, we included a wide range of questions regarding the employers' hiring policies, their preferences for a wide range of applicant types, and their experiences with recent hires. Of particular interest here, we included an extensive module which probed employers regarding their attitudes about and experiences with workers with criminal records.

Complementing the employer telephone surveys, we drew an additional subset from our employer sample (n=55) for the purpose of conducting in-depth in-person interviews. Through a series of open-ended questions, we solicited employers' own accounts of the jobs they seek to fill and the workers they find to fill them. During the interviews, which lasted between 45 minutes to 2 hours, employers were asked a series of questions probing perceptions of various groups of workers for an understanding of how race/ethnicity/criminal record may become important signals to employers making hiring decisions in the context of minimal information. These in-depth interviews allowed for more open-ended discussions of employers' concerns and considerations in hiring entry-level workers, providing greater insight into exactly how and why employers make the decisions they do.

In the following section, we provide an overview of employers' considerations and concerns regarding applicants with criminal backgrounds. We present the main results from the survey data paired with the rich qualitative data from our in-depth interviews to better understand employers' perspectives.

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Results[4]

In the survey we see a fairly strong reluctance to hire applicants with criminal records: Just over a quarter of employers (26%) indicated that they would probably or definitely be willing to hire an applicant with a criminal record, relative to 63% who said they probably or definitely would not, and only 11% who indicated that their decision would depend on the type or circumstances of the crime.[5] Several of the in-depth interviews further reflected employers' significant concerns about workers with criminal pasts. According to the manager of a retail store, *"I just think that people here would not allow someone with a criminal record to be around people that do not have a criminal record. It just is not safe. It is not fair to the other employees. To be around that kind of environment. You never know what can happen. If I had the power, I would make sure no one with a criminal record was ever hired here. It just is not right. I just think I wouldn't go for that."*

Despite the New York City Human Rights Law which prohibits blanket discrimination against individuals with criminal records, several employers candidly stated that any candidate with a criminal background would be immediately disqualified. According to one employer, *"It isn't worth the risk for us. That is company policy. We have a place on the application that asks about this. It is just not negotiable."* Even among employers from large national companies—whose attentiveness to legal requirements is typically far greater than small local employers—we see several cases of blanket bans on ex-offenders. Managers from three different national retail clothing stores told us of their company's policies against hiring ex-offenders. When asked how information about a criminal record might affect his evaluation of an applicant, the manager of

[4] In this report, we focus primarily on employers' views about applicants with criminal records. While race was also an important focus of this study as a whole, questions about racial attitudes and experiences are more difficult to probe using standard survey techniques. We did discuss these topics in more detail during the in-person interviews; further discussion of this analysis can be found in Pager & Karafin, 2009.

[5] Responses differed moderately by race of the employer, with black and Hispanic employers indicating a somewhat greater openness to hiring ex-offenders (25% and 30%, respectively) than white employers (23%).

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one of these clothing chains replied, *"It doesn't impact me in any way, because at that point I'm not allowed to hire them."*

The manager of another retail chain elaborated on his understanding of his company's policy, and regulations about what information can be shared with applicants.

> *I: Okay, so I have a few more questions about your screening process. Let's say you have an applicant and you find out that they have a criminal record. How would you view this information?*
>
> *A: Well we can't reveal that information. I would just say to the applicant that at the moment it's not going to be possible because he can't qualify. You know, 'Thanks for applying but at this time it won't be possible. You are not right, we are looking for availability, it doesn't fit what we need, what the company is looking for.' You know, maybe you were making way too much money before, or something like that. I don't want to hurt anyone, you can't reveal that information, so you have got to keep it to yourself company-wise.*
>
> *I: So does the company have a formal policy about hiring ex-offenders?*
>
> *A: Yes.*
>
> *I: Does it matter based on the type of record, type of crime, and so forth?*
>
> *A: Anybody or anything or any sort of issues and we won't hire you.*

According to this manager, applicants are not meant to be told the specific reason for their dismissal when related to concerns about a criminal background, perhaps out of concern for legal challenges by the applicant in question. Nevertheless, the company appears to follow a clearcut rule against hiring ex-offenders.

The manager of a third national retail clothing store expressed similar concerns about legal challenges from applicants, though in this case inverts the law's intent, which is to promote individualized reviews rather than blanket restrictions. When asked whether exceptions could be made for exceptional candidates with criminal records this manager replied:

> *A: Absolutely not. If their background check does not come back clear, they would not be hired.*

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I: I see. So that's just decided at the corporate level?

A: Correct.... From the company perspective, I think we're a large enough company now where you have to have some black and white rules, you know? You can't say, "Well, this is a drug conviction for possession. This guy's a really nice kid. We're going to hire him." Someone else comes back with stealing from another company. We're not going to hire him. That's opens you up for a lawsuit right there. And probably someone's never going to find out about that, because all their information's confidential, but it opens you up for a lawsuit, because you're not treating people fairly. So from the company's perspective, it makes sense to me to have certain rules that are just black and white. If your background check comes back negative, or it's not clear, sorry. Good luck on your search.

Whether based on formal company policy or the personal preferences of managers, that nearly two-thirds of employers expressed a reluctance to hire applicants with criminal records points the serious barriers facing young men leaving prison. Even as bipartisan support grows for supporting prisoner reentry (as evidenced by passage of the Second Chance Act), employers—who remain at the front lines of reentry efforts—remain highly skeptical of this population. Interestingly, employers' survey responses suggest an even stronger reluctance to hire ex-offenders than we see in the audit study, where roughly half the employers who hired at least one tester hired the tester presenting a criminal background. The disparity between survey and audit results may be do to a difference in attitudes versus behavior (e.g., even those who do not like the idea of hiring an ex-offender may do so if their labor needs are sufficiently great). We suspect, rather, that the primary difference results from our use of attractive, well-qualified testers who did not fit the employers' stereotype or expectation of an ex-offender. When answering the survey questions, employers are unlikely to have been imagining a candidate as appealing as those represented by our testers. If this is the case, the results of our audit study are likely to represent a highly conservative estimate of the effect of a criminal record on hiring outcomes, particularly as experienced by the more typical ex-offender who possesses lower levels of schooling and prior work experience.

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Employers' Concerns about Applicants with Criminal Records

When asked to describe their main concerns about hiring an applicant with a criminal record, employers focused on several key issues. A large number of employers focused on specific problem behaviors such as theft (21%), issues of violence and safety (9%), or the likelihood of reoffending (6%).[6] The manager of a record store explained, *"If it was theft and they were convicted I am going to stay away from that because it is very easy to steal from the warehouse and they have a lot of problems with people stealing CD's and DVD's. Those are tempting items. Now I know that is kind of discriminatory but I still do it. It is just one of those things that sits in the back of my head."* Likewise, the manager of a local wine store told us, "*We do have a big problem with theft, as you can imagine. So, I wouldn't want to hire someone who has had a problem in the past with stealing. I think this is a very tempting environment."* Concerns over theft came up often in our discussions with employers, particularly in retail environments or where employees are often handling cash or expensive merchandise.

A number of employers regarded violence and/or safety in the workplace as a primary concern when probed about hiring applicants with a criminal record. Many of these employers noted the discrepancy between non-violent and violent offenders as a critical element in their decision-making. Specifically, these employers expressed a fear of putting themselves, their employees, their customers, and the company as a whole, at risk. The manager of a testing company emphasized that he would avoid "*any kind of crimes that deal with bodily harm. Uh, you know, always concerned for the safety and welfare of my employees... I have to be worried about my employees."* Some also expressed concern that those with a violent past could not be

[6] The distribution of concerns differed somewhat across telephone survey and in-depth interview samples. In our in-person interviews with employers more than 40% regarded violence and/or safety in the workplace as a primary concern when probed about hiring applicants with a criminal record. Just over half (54%) regarded issues of theft a primary concern.

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trusted with sensitive situations that could emerge – such a frustrating interaction with a customer, as in the case of this manager from a car dealership:

> *I mean if you have somebody with armed robbery, or rape, or something like that, this is a violent person and I don't want that here. This is a very sensitive business. People come in and they expect a lot. We don't have a good reputation to begin with. People would prefer to go to the dentist rather than buy a car. (laughs) People come in sometimes and they will be short-tempered. Oh my god. They will say something like, oh my car is scratched, and they will come in screaming and yelling. You have to be able to diffuse that situation. I need somebody with patience. I need somebody that can talk to the person, calm them down, and rectify the problem. What I don't need is someone that is just going to turn around to someone that is screaming at them and punch them in the face.*

In addition to concerns over problem behaviors, employers also discussed character flaws reflected by a criminal history, such as concerns over honestly/trustworthiness (16%) or character/reliability (3%). When asked about her primary concerns about considering an applicant with a criminal record, one retail employer stated simply, "*Well, mostly the concern of trust. Can the person be trusted? This would be my biggest concern.*" Another employer went further in explaining his view of an individual with a criminal record:

> *I would just be reluctant, you know, about morality, their character. Like a pedophile or someone who has a record of that type. Even though we don't have kids in our place I would still be looking at that person, not fearful, but with contempt. So maybe I wouldn't hire that person. Maybe I am being prejudiced but I think it is a legitimate concern. I would really really have to give it some thought before I would hire someone who was a criminal in the past. The person has to have references a mile high for me to feel confidant. Somebody would have to call me and say I know the person for so long and he is under my care, he is in a program right now.*

Finally, a few employers cited specific hassles associated with hiring ex-offenders as a primary reason for avoiding such applicants. According to a tour company manager:

> *I don't want to have to deal with parole officers, probation officers, sending letters, having somebody come by to check up on them, and that kind of stuff. I can't have that type of distraction. I am just too busy for that. You know, as good as somebody might be, I have 40 other employees to think about and their welfare and their well-being. I don't know what kind of people the ex-offender may be associated with that might be coming here to look for them. It is kind of like, this is a business. We are publicly traded on the New York Stock Exchange.*

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An employer from a video rental store emphasized a similar kind of hassle, though in this case related more to his practice of paying workers off the books:

> *I mean the only thing [that would make me reluctant to hire someone with a criminal record] would be that I do hire a lot of people off the books. And ex-offenders do have to show a pay stub to their parole officer, so that could be an issue for me. I would have to work it out where they were on the books I guess.*

Though many employers expressed strong opinions about how they would view an applicant with a criminal record, a sizeable fraction (31%) indicated that their evaluation of the candidate would depend on the severity, nature, and circumstances of offense.[7] According to a toy store manager, *"It depends kind of on the situation. How long ago was it, what was it? There are people that have turned around and they are fine now. I am sure that some of them have worked for us and we don't even know. It is hard to know."* The manager of an employment agency echoed these sentiments, emphasizing the severity of the crime as a key determinant of his evaluation: "*Well, it depends on what the crime is, and how long they were in prison. If they were in for 20 years, that would be bad. You know, you wouldn't be in jail for 20 years for stealing a bagel from a restaurant. Length of time is important. That can show if it was a very serious thing.*"

When we asked the manager of a bakery about her views on hiring an applicant with a criminal record, her initial response was very negative, but she then conditioned this reaction with attention to the specifics of the offense:

> *I: If you found out an applicant had a criminal record, how would you view this information?*

---

[7] This distribution is based on an open-ended survey that asked, "What would be your main concern about hiring an applicant with a criminal record?" Earlier in the survey, we asked a more general close-ended ended question which asked, "Would you be willing to hire an applicant with a criminal record?" In response to this question (discussed above) nearly 90 percent offered a firm positive or negative response, with only 11 percent indicating that their decision would "depend on the crime." This latter category represents a spontaneous response—not one solicited by the close-ended format—suggesting that these employers were resistant to being placed in a category they felt inappropriately reflected their views. When allowed to answer in the open-ended format, by contrast, far more conveyed variability in their responses. This finding is consistent with other surveys (e.g., Holzer et al., 2002, Pager, 2007), who report that up to 30 percent of employers report that their response "depends on the crime."

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> *A: Eww. (pauses) I'm not sure. I don't like criminals (laughs). But, you know, I guess it depends. What the crime was, how long ago it was, how rehabilitated they seem. I wouldn't make a definite generalization and say no I wouldn't hire a criminal, or yes, it wouldn't matter at all. You know, it depends on the individual and the circumstance.*

Another employer from a dessert chain emphasized the importance of offense severity, as well as evidence of rehabilitation and future orientation.

> *Well, I would first look at what the offense was, if it was a misdemeanor or a felony. From there I would speak to the person, and try to get a feel for what they were trying to do. What is their plan long-term, and what are their goals? I definitely wouldn't have any problem hiring someone with a prior conviction, though I don't get to make the final decision here. For someone who I feel would work out great, I would certainly put my neck on the line to help them get hired here. I don't think it is the deciding factor though, whether or not they have a record. I think their character is what matters. I do think that the other managers and the owners would view a criminal record as a red flag, since you did have an incident. They would be very reluctant to hire someone like that. But, for me, I would really hope that they would at least consider them.*

The manager of an ice cream chain emphasized the distinction between violent and non-violent offense types:

> *Last year, this kid came to me because he was kicked out of his high school because he had a drug problem. He said that he went through rehab and all this stuff and is trying to turn his life around. I like that, so I gave him a job. He worked out great. Or, you know, if someone was convicted of something that I felt was a crime. Marijuana possession or something like that. I really wouldn't care too much about. Anything violent, if I was privy to that knowledge, I would definitely not hire them. Violence isn't good. I wouldn't want that vibe around here. Especially if I knew the person had a history of it.*

In each of these cases, employers appear sensitized to the diversity of criminal records, and apply varying degrees of scrutiny depending on how they evaluate information about risk. Though employers emphasized a wide range of distinctions, the most common appeared to be distinctions according to crime type (with violent offenses and theft eliciting the greatest concern) and signs of rehabilitation (e.g., time since offense, evidence of drug treatment, indications of sincere repentance, etc.).

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Legal Liability

A growing literature emphasizes employers' concerns over legal liability as a key factor reducing the job prospects of ex-offenders. Indeed, a few employers in our sample did raise such concerns. For example, an employer for a large national company explained: *"There's a legal category called negligent hiring, if we knowingly hired somebody that had a criminal record, say someone was charged with physical assault, we would subject to a lawsuit under negligent hiring we should have known this person was apt to act out violently in the workplace."* The manager of a courier company, discussing his reluctance to hire anyone with a history of violent crime, touched on similar themes, though couched as an insurance concern: *"It's an insurance problem. I can't, I can't get insurance coverage, I can't bond, and I'm going to be sitting here wondering, if he has a problem at work, is he going to smack somebody, one of my customers, or do something like that in the street?"* For these employers, workers with criminal records pose risks that extend beyond specific acts of violence or theft to represent significant financial liability.

Interestingly, however, less than one percent of the employers in our telephone survey sample mentioned the issue of legal liability as a key concern. Further, when asked about the issue directly in the in-person interviews, most employers had never heard of negligent hiring laws. Even those who were familiar with these laws appeared more concerned over the behaviors themselves (violence, theft) than potential legal liability resulting from those behaviors. According to a retail store manager,

> *I mean, it is not in the forefront of my thoughts. I think people with a violent nature, and anger problems, seem to have those regularly. They are explosive. I try my best to be in a situation where I don't have to deal with that. Dealing with the public can be a trying experience.... But in general, I am not usually thinking, oh, I don't want to take this person because I am afraid I am going to have some legal issue.*

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The manager of a record distribution company dismissed the notion that individuals with criminal records pose any particular liability:

> *I: Are there ever any legal issues that you would worry about in hiring ex-offenders?*
>
> *A: Umm actually no. To tell you the truth no. You know what, I honestly have never thought about this before. (laughs) But thinking about it now, if it were to happen, I think there would be some type of liability case whether or not the person had a prior record. Yeah.*

The owner of a supply company felt confident that the ex-offenders referred to his business were insured against possible liability:

> *I: Are there ever any legal issues that you would worry about in hiring ex-offenders?*
>
> *A: None. If I am hiring one of those it is from one of those programs and they are guaranteed and they are bonded. If they do anything here then I would be reimbursed.*

These findings stand against the growing literature emphasizing negligent hiring laws as a major reason that employers are reluctant to hire ex-offenders (e.g., Bushway et al., 2007). It is likely that employers for large national companies (underrepresented by our sample) have more elaborate legal regulations related to hiring,[8] norms about which may ultimately trickle down to smaller employers over time. Nevertheless, our results suggest that negligent hiring laws themselves are not at present a major barrier to employment for ex-offenders. Rather, possible problem behaviors themselves (e.g., violence, theft), rather than legal liability for those behaviors, appear to drive employers concerns about this population.

In general, laws appear to have only marginal effects on employer attitudes about hiring ex-offenders. As discussed earlier, New York City offers protection from blanket discrimination on the basis of a criminal record, though many employers are unaware of the specific legal

[8] This is also consistent with our finding from the audit study that large employers are less likely to hire applicants with criminal records (opposite to the pattern of hiring racial minorities).

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provisions and/or seem unconcerned about their effects. Only a few employers explicitly referred to antidiscrimination law in discussing the evaluation of applicants with criminal records. For example, one manager of a national clothing chain explained:

> *Well legally you don't turn an application away as long as they reveal that on their application and they are forthcoming. You know it really depends. I guess it depends on what they did. I would always pass it to HR if it was someone that I thought was worthy of the job, I would always partner with Human Resources first. You don't want to discriminate. It is against the law to discriminate like that. And we have had that, where we hired those kind of people, and that is what I do, I partner with our HR department. They help to make sure that I am not breaking any rules, you know.*

In general, however, special legal protections appeared to have little effect on employer's attitudes about hiring ex-offenders. Even among employers who were aware of antidiscrimination laws protecting people with criminal records (a question we explicitly asked on the survey), fully 60% maintained that they would not be willing to hire an ex-offender. While lower than the 70% unwilling to hire ex-offenders among those who do not believe ex-offenders are covered by antidiscrimination law, in either case a large majority of employers remain unwilling to hire applicants with criminal backgrounds.

In contrast to sanctions, we see some evidence that incentives are associated with changes in employer behavior. Tax credits and the federal bonding program, in particular, appear to play some role in employers' considerations. Of those who had hired an ex-offender in the past year, roughly 12% had claimed the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and 4% have had their ex-offender employees covered by the Federal Bonding Program. Of those who had claimed the WOTC, fully 78% indicated they would be willing to hire ex-offenders in the future (7 of the 9 employers who had claimed the WOTC), relative to only 43% of those who had hired ex-offenders in the past but did not claim tax credit for those hires. Both employers who had bonded ex-offender employees through this program indicated they would be willing to hire ex-offenders in the future, though the sample size here is too small to generate reliable comparisons.

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Though only a small minority of employers who hire ex-offenders make use of tax credits and federal bonding, these incentives do appear to increase employers' willingness to continue hiring ex-offenders in the future.

An Uncomfortable Subject

The results of the audit study suggested that, though employers clearly notice criminal background information in reviewing job applicants, many are reluctant to discuss the subject explicitly. Likewise, in our interviews with employers, some emphasized the discomfort and anxiety that accompanies evaluations of applicants with criminal pasts. In some cases, employers emphasized not just interpersonal anxiety but also the perception that they were legally constrained from probing applicants about private legal matters. For example, one employer expressed the belief that criminal record information was off-limits in screening applicants:

> *A: In all honesty I am not really supposed to know what they have done anyway so most of the time I really don't know unless they voluntarily tell me. Usually I just don't know.*
>
> *I: You don't ask this on the application?*
>
> *A: No, you can't ask them. It is against the law.*

Likewise, the manager of a local restaurant expressed the belief that employers are prohibited from asking applicants about their criminal pasts:

> *We do the criminal check. We can't ask them, 'Are you a criminal or not?' That's why we check, the criminal check. So it says everything. Also it's against the law, you can't ask them, 'Are you criminal? Are you?'*

For the manager of a national restaurant chain, perceived limits on acquiring information about a criminal record leads to a better-safe-than-sorry policy of blanket exclusion:

> *This person is probably not trustworthy. They're not dependent, and if you're using drugs, how much are you using drugs. And I cannot go and ask you a question. 'All right, you [were] convicted of using drugs, how much drugs [did] you use?' I cannot ask that question. My question solely has to be based on your*

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> *quality and your ability to do the job. So, being that I can't ask that question straightforward I have to just use my own judgment and say I should probably stay away from this person. Just to be safe.*

In this case, the employer's misperception of the kinds of questions that are lawfully appropriate in job interviews leads him to refrain from probing about the context of the conviction and instead avoid ex-offenders altogether. As we saw above in the interactions between applicants and employers in the audit study, employers who refrained from discussing the record with job applicants were much less likely to hire these candidates, particularly in the case of black ex-offenders.

The additional discomfort of race was raised explicitly by an employer for a tour company, who commented on the problem of being perceived as racist for inquiring about an applicant's criminal background: *"I try not to ask [about a criminal background in the interview] because sometimes people are like, 'What, are you racially profiling me?' So I do ask everybody but it is very hard to ask. It is not an easy question...."* This employer appears to struggle with concerns about how to talk about an applicant's criminal history without appearing to be unfairly targeting black applicants for scrutiny. Given the charged issues around race and perceived discrimination, employers may be especially reluctant to voice concerns about criminal records with black applicants, perhaps feeding in to some of the racial disparities reported above. If employers feel uncomfortable inquiring about an applicant's criminal background and gathering additional information about the context of the conviction, they may instead choose to simply rule out these applicants altogether.

Prior Experiences with Ex-Offenders

According to the survey, about 30 percent of New York City employers have hired an applicant with a criminal record over the past year. In both the survey and during in-person interviews, we asked employers to tell us about their previous experiences with workers with criminal

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backgrounds. In a few cases, employers reported negative experiences with ex-offender employees. For example, the manager of a dessert chain told us about one recent experience: *"Well, I have had an applicant who worked here, who was in a juvenile hall. She had a history with drugs. And, umm. She was trying to clean up her act. Eventually I had to fire her. She was showing up late, going out all night."* Though this employer remained open to the possibility of hiring ex-offenders in the future, the experience points to some of the potential problems posed by individuals with histories of substance abuse. For others, negative experiences left them extremely reluctant to hire applicants with criminal backgrounds in the future. For example, the manager of a retail store explained, *"We recently had a receptionist who was stealing from the register. We had known about a drug history past. And she was in recovery and so we gave her a chance. I don't think that my boss would take that chance again."* In this case, one negative experience can lead to strong generalized views about the risks posed by ex-offenders.

Apart from a small number of strongly negative experiences, for the most part employers reported mixed or positive experiences with ex-offenders, leaving them open to hiring additional ex-offenders in the future. According to the manager of a clothing chain, *"So, in terms of the criminal record, it does not mean that I wouldn't hire them. I have hired them before. I have had two great employees that had criminal records, and I have had one horrible one. So it is kind of hit or miss."* Similarly, the manager of a courier company explained, *"Very rarely do I have guys from the facility or programs that I work with that end up getting in trouble here. In six years of hiring I would say maybe two of the ex-offenders I have hired have done something on the job that they weren't supposed to do."*

Consistent with these more positive experiences, in general we find evidence that previous experience with ex-offenders increases the likelihood that an employer would be

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willing to hire ex-offenders in the future. Of those who had hired an ex-offender in the past year, fully 43% indicated they would be willing to hire an applicant with a criminal record in the future, relative to only 17% of those without recent experience hiring ex-offenders. Some of this disparity is likely to simply reflect the diverse applicant pools different employers draw from; but we also see some evidence that the experience of working with ex-offenders actively reduces employers' concerns. Indeed, roughly 85% of employers who have hired ex-offenders in the past year report their work performance to be at or above average, suggesting that in general employers are having fairly positive experiences with this group of employees. The following excerpt comes from an interview with the manager of a national retail store:

> *I: How have the employees you have hired with a record worked out compared to employees you have hired without a record?*
>
> *A: Umm, actually they have pretty much been good employees. I don't know if it is because they had to keep the job. (laughs) But you know I didn't have a problem with them. I mean a few people that have applied with a criminal background have been turned away, but it was because like one told me he had been convicted of attempted murder. So that kind of scared me a little. I went through HR and it was time consuming but we decided not to hire him. But that was a good thing. I have hired people though and I haven't really had bad experiences with these people.*

Several employers emphasized particular advantages of ex-offenders as employees, in that they may be more likely to take the job seriously and value the opportunity more than workers with wider options. An employer for a manufacturing company described his experiences:

> *I: Is there any way to predict whether or not an applicant will be likely to steal, aside from them having a criminal record?*
>
> *A: You know you really can't tell. The majority of them are fine. These are just examples that I'm pulling out because you are asking me. So those two are the only ones. We have another fellow downstairs who is here every day and is very good. We had to sign for him for being in the halfway house and he is a wonderful guy. A lot of people here need their jobs so they are very committed.*
>
> *I: How many ex-offenders do you currently have on staff?*
>
> *A: Let's see. We have about 4 right now and really they are working out fine.*

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The manager of a specialty foods store reports similar experiences, emphasizing how committed ex-offenders are to staying out of prison:

> *A: We have actually hired people on work-release programs. So that is not a problem. Having a problem, giving someone a second chance is not a problem. It is when they are not reformed and they continue. And honestly, my feeling on that is that you are so close to getting out that you are not going to screw up. You have a taste of freedom but you have to go back at a certain time after work. You have an hour and a half or whatever it is that you have to get home. So you are too close to tasting that freedom that you are not going to screw up here. So that is my theory on why they are going to be good for us.*
>
> *I: How did the ex-offender employees you hired work out?*
>
> *A: Oh they worked out good. I think that system really works.*

An employer for a courier company echoed these sentiments, "*I've had a couple of people that were upfront, said they had criminal backgrounds, and I checked in with their parole or probation officers, and they worked out pretty well.... Matter of fact they, they turned out to be some of the better workers. 'Cause they're trying to make another shot at life for themselves.*"

Overall, then, employers reported generally positive experiences with ex-offenders and remain more open to hiring ex-offenders in the future relative to those with no recent experience. Further, employers who have had recent experience working with ex-offenders report fewer serious concerns about this group relative to employers who have no recent experience. As shown in Table 1, fully a quarter of employers with no recent experience with ex-offender employees are concerned about theft by this group, relative to less than half that proportion of employers who have hired ex-offenders in the past year. Likewise, 18% of employers unfamiliar with ex-offenders are concerned about honesty or trustworthiness, relative to only 11% of those who have recently hired ex-offenders. Employers who have worked with ex-offenders in the recent past are more likely to acknowledge wide variation among the ex-offender population, with 45% indicating that their willingness to hire an ex-offender would depend on the severity, nature, or circumstances of the crime (relative to just 26% of those employers less experienced

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with this population). Interestingly, those with recent experience with ex-offender employees were more than twice as likely to report concerns over reliability (4.8% vs 2.2%) and drug/alcohol use (2.4% vs 0.44%), though each of these concerns came up among less than five percent of employers overall.

Table 1. Primary Concern about Hiring an Applicant with a Criminal Record, by Prior Experience with Ex-Offender Employees

	Hired Ex-Offender in Past Year?		
Concern	no	yes	total
depends on severity/circumstance	26.22	44.48	31.17
theft/stealing	24.89	12.05	21.43
honesty/trustworthiness	17.78	10.84	15.91
violence/safety	8.89	9.64	9.09
concern over worker quality	3.56	4.82	3.90
will re-offend	6.67	4.82	6.17
reliability	2.22	4.82	2.92
drugs/alcohol	0.44	2.41	0.97
constraints due to parole	1.33	1.20	1.30
legal/liability concerns	0.89	2.41	1.30
other	7.11	2.41	5.84
total	100	100	100

In general, then, experience with ex-offender employees appears to reduce employers' major anxieties about this group (theft, honesty), while increasing recognition of the diversity of the ex-offender population and the need to carefully review the context and severity of the individual's criminal history.

Mirroring findings about the importance of personal contact presented above, these results suggest that the more familiarity employers have with ex-offenders—either based on previous employees or through personalizing information about a particular ex-offender applicant—the more open an employer is likely to be with respect to hiring such candidates.

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Conclusion to Stage II

Many studies of employers focus merely on employers' own accounts, taking at face value the concerns, priorities, and practices they describe (e.g., Holzer, 1996; Waldinger and Lichter, 2003). This research, by contrast, is solidly grounded in external observation of employer behavior. The audit study demonstrates the selection process in real employment interactions; the interviews with employers then help us to understand the thought processes and considerations that may have led to the observed outcomes. In this way, the research offers the unique opportunity to examine what employers say in the context of what they actually do.

Substantial investment has gone into developing programs that facilitate offender reentry. Such efforts routinely emphasize the fundamental importance of employment, typically with a focus on improving the skills and resources of the offenders themselves (Travis, 2003; Petersilia, 2003; SVORI, 2004). We applaud these efforts, and hope to build on their insights. Developing an approach complementary to offender-focused strategies, we place emphasis on the demand side of the labor market. Improving the job readiness of ex-offenders can only be effective if employers are willing to hire individuals with criminal records. Understanding the strength and sources of employers' aversion to ex-offenders can direct us in shaping strategies to facilitate effective job placement for this group.

This research raises important questions about the kinds of policies that may make employers more likely to hire ex-offenders. In particular, we believe this research has important implications for the work of parole officers and employment mediators. Given the findings that employers' anxieties about hiring ex-offenders focus more on risk (of violence/theft) rather than skills, these groups can play an invaluable role in helping to reduce the uncertainty associated with hiring individuals with criminal pasts. Parole officers and employment mediators can speak knowledgeably to the concerns of employers, helping them to better understand the risks

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associated with different kinds of offenders, as well as in providing additional sources of oversight for these workers. In the spirit of Petersilia's (2003) suggestion of establishing community partnerships, this research supports the development of relationships between parole agencies, intermediaries, and employers, improving the prospects for reintegration and public safety overall.

Dissemination Strategy

We have presented the results of this research in a number of public and academic forums. Early versions of the audit research were presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, the Population Association of America, and at numerous academic departments. In addition, we were invited to present our results for a regional meeting of the EEOC in New York City, for the New York City Council Civil Rights Committee, and at the New York State Attorney General's Office on Civil Rights. We were also invited to testify at a hearing of the EEOC in Washington DC concerning employment regulations governing the use of criminal records. Our research was featured in a conference sponsored by the New York City Commission on Human Rights, with hundreds of New York employers in attendance; and at a public forum sponsored by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice (leading to coverage in the *New York Times* and several local media outlets). Finally, we are publishing our results in a number of academic journals, including forthcoming articles in the *American Sociological Review*, the *Annals of the American Society of Political and Social Sciences*, and the *University of Chicago Legal Forum*.

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Sequencing Disadvantage: Barriers to Employment Facing Young Black and White Men with Criminal Records

By
DEVAH PAGER,
BRUCE WESTERN,
and
NAOMI SUGIE

In this article, the authors report the results of a large-scale field experiment conducted in New York City investigating the effects of race and a prison record on employment. Teams of black and white men were matched and sent to apply for low-wage jobs throughout the city, presenting equivalent resumés and differing only in their race and criminal background. The authors find a significant negative effect of a criminal record on employment outcomes that appears substantially larger for African Americans. The sequence of interactions preceding hiring decisions suggests that black applicants are less often invited to interview, thereby providing fewer opportunities to establish rapport with the employer. Furthermore, employers' general reluctance to discuss the criminal record of an applicant appears especially harmful for black ex-offenders. Overall, these results point to the importance of rapport-building for finding work, something that the stigmatizing characteristics of minority and criminal status make more difficult to achieve.

Keywords: race; criminal record; discrimination; employment; low-wage labor markets

Roughly seven hundred thousand inmates are released from prison each year, a fivefold increase from the late 1970s (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2004). Consisting mostly of young men with less than a college education, about two-thirds of ex-prisoners remain out of work a year after prison release, and 60 percent are rearrested within three years (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2002; Petersilia 2003; Travis 2005). Those that can find steady work are less likely to return to prison and are better-equipped to assume the mainstream social roles of spouse and parent (Lopoo and Western 2005; Sampson and Laub 1993; Uggen 2000). Unfortunately, the goal of stable employment remains elusive for a large fraction of ex-offenders. The challenges of reentering society from prison are compounded for many by the racial stigma

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produced by prejudice and discrimination. Black men are about six times more likely than whites to be sent to prison and are likewise overrepresented among released prisoners (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2004). Some evidence suggests that blacks may also pay a higher penalty for having a criminal record relative to otherwise similar whites (Pager 2007). Given these patterns, understanding the nature of criminal and racial stigma—and the combination of the two—represents an important goal for research and policy.

We study the effects of race and a prison record on employment with a large-scale field experiment conducted in New York City. In this study, teams of black and white men were matched and sent to apply for hundreds of low-wage jobs throughout the city, presenting equivalent resumés and differing only in their race and criminal background. These results build upon our earlier work (Pager 2003), pointing to a robust interaction between race and criminal background. Furthermore, this research allows us to look with more detail into the interpersonal contact between job seekers and employers for some insight into the process by which race and criminal background translate into labor market disadvantages.

We find a significant negative effect of a criminal record on employment outcomes, and one that appears substantially larger for African Americans. The sequence of interactions preceding hiring decisions suggests that black applicants are less often invited to interview, thereby providing fewer opportunities to establish rapport with the employer. Furthermore, employers' general reluctance to discuss the criminal record of an applicant appears especially harmful for black ex-offenders. Overall, these results point to the importance of rapport-building for finding work, something that the stigmatizing characteristics of minority and criminal status make more difficult to achieve.

Stigma, Rapport, and the Job-Matching Process

Little is known about the process by which employers select workers. Economic models of employment often assume that the productivity of prospective workers can be readily assessed, but in reality, employers often face acute information

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Devah Pager is an associate professor of sociology and a faculty associate of the Office of Population Research at Princeton University. Her research focuses on institutions affecting racial stratification, including education, labor markets, and the criminal justice system. Her recent book, Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration *(University of Chicago 2007), describes the results from a field experiment investigating the racial and economic consequences of large-scale imprisonment for contemporary U.S. labor markets.*

Bruce Western is a professor of sociology and director of the Program in Inequality and Social Policy at Harvard University. His research interests are in the areas of social stratification and inequality, political sociology, and statistical methods. His latest book, Punishment and Inequality in America *(Russell Sage Foundation 2006), examines the causes, scope, and consequences of the growth of the U.S. penal system.*

Naomi Sugie is a PhD student in sociology and social policy at Princeton University. Before beginning her graduate studies, she worked at the Vera Institute of Justice on child welfare, policing, and jail reentry issues. She is coauthor of a book profiling working mothers living in New York City shelters and is currently investigating the economic consequences of incarceration on families of offenders.

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shortages in evaluating new hires. Particularly in low-wage job markets, where few concrete skills or experience are required, employers typically rely on limited information provided on a resumé or gathered during a cursory interview. Indeed, many employers claim to base hiring decisions on a "gut feeling" about candidates (Moss and Tilly 2001, 209), the source of which remains largely unknown.

Where employers are often looking for applicants with whom they feel an intuitive rapport, applicants with stigmatizing characteristics (such as minority status or a criminal background) may face special barriers to establishing such a rapport, even if possessing otherwise highly appealing characteristics. Indeed, a wealth of social psychological evidence indicates that negative stereotypes compromise interactions and undermine the ability of interaction partners to demonstrate traits that are inconsistent with stereotypical expectations. Experimental evidence suggests that people ask fewer questions of stereotyped targets (Trope and Thomson 1997) and selectively notice and retain information consistent with the stereotypes while ignoring information that is inconsistent with initial expectations (Fiske and Neuberg 1990). Although the effects of stereotypes have been shown to weaken as personalizing information becomes available (Allport 1954; Anderson 1999; Fiske and Neuberg 1990), perceivers are less likely to seek out or retain individuating information when confronted with members of stigmatized social groups.

It is easy to imagine how this process might play out in employment settings. In cases where employers are confronted with stereotyped applicants, they may be more likely to make negative attributions about the individual without probing deeper into the specific characteristics of the applicant in question. Employers may be less likely to grant an interview to such applicants and, during the course of an interview, may ask fewer questions or provide less opportunity for the applicant to present his or her profile in the best light (e.g., Word, Zanna, and Cooper 1974). While in some cases these dynamics may result from overt prejudice, they can also come from simple discomfort or more subtle, unconscious biases (Crocker, Major, and Steele 1998).

Most of the research on stereotyping and social interaction focuses on racial differences. In contemporary low-wage urban labor markets, a criminal conviction represents another source of disadvantage that may contribute to the differential treatment of young low-skill men. In fact, one might expect the effect of a criminal conviction to be more disqualifying for job applicants than racial stigma because of its direct association with negative behaviors—like dishonesty, violence, or unreliability—that suggest poor job performance on the job. On the other hand, criminal history is a legitimate topic of discussion in a job interview, with job applications commonly asking about criminal backgrounds and employers often discussing criminal convictions with job seekers. These opportunities for candid discussion may provide chances to defuse the effect of a criminal background, a strategy less available in the case of racial stigma, where prevailing norms discourage open conversations about race. Furthermore, relatively little is known about how various stigmatizing characteristics may interact to produce new forms of labor market disadvantage. How do employers' assumptions or concerns about black applicants overlap with or intensify their concerns about ex-offenders? In what ways do the barriers facing one applicant type (e.g., a black

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applicant) contribute to the disadvantages experienced by those with additional stigmatizing characteristics (e.g., a black ex-offender)?

These ideas were previously examined in Pager's (2003) audit study of entry-level jobs in Milwaukee. Using an audit methodology, replicated in this article, two-person teams of trained testers were assigned resumés with equivalent schooling and work histories. Within each team, one tester was randomly assigned a criminal record. The applicant pairs applied for entry-level jobs, measuring the extent to which race and a criminal background represented barriers to employment. Milwaukee employers strongly disfavored job seekers with criminal records, and the penalty of the criminal record was especially large for blacks. These results suggested that minority status compounds the stigma of a criminal record, though the mechanism through which this stigma is exerted remained unobserved.

We replicate the design of the Milwaukee study in New York City, and look beyond the general patterns of employment to investigate the sequence of events that precede an ultimate hiring decision. In particular, we examine the patterns of interaction (quantity and kind) experienced by black and white job seekers and their relationship to ultimate hiring outcomes. By studying the hiring process through this lens, we can better understand how rapport-building is facilitated or compromised as a function of an applicant's race or criminal background.

Data and Methods

The New York City Hiring Discrimination Study sent matched teams of testers to apply for 250 real entry-level jobs throughout New York City over nine months in 2004. The testers were well-spoken, clean-shaven young men, ages twenty-two to twenty-six. Most were college-educated, between 5 feet 10 inches and 6 feet in height, and recruited in and around New York City. They were matched on the basis of their verbal skills, interactional styles (level of eye-contact, demeanor, and verbosity), and physical attractiveness. Testers were assigned fictitious resumés indicating identical educational attainment and comparability in quality of high school, work experience, and neighborhood of residence. Resumés were prepared in different fonts and formats and randomly varied across testers, with each resumé used by testers from each race group. Testers presented themselves as high school graduates with steady work experience in entry-level jobs. Finally, the testers passed through a common training program to ensure uniform behavior in job interviews. While in the field, they dressed similarly and communicated with teammates by cell phone to forewarn one another of unusual interview situations.

To study employers' responses to applicants with criminal records, we fielded two teams of testers. The first team paired two white applicants, one presenting a criminal record and the other a clean record. The second team paired two similar black applicants. None of the testers had real criminal backgrounds, but presented fictitious records to employers. Testers rotated which member of the pair presented criminal background information, which allowed for control of

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within-pair differences that might affect hiring outcomes. The criminal record was typically disclosed in answer to the standard question on job applications: "Have you ever been convicted of a crime? If yes, please explain." When asked, testers were instructed to reveal that they were recently released from prison after serving eighteen months for a drug felony (possession with intent to distribute cocaine). Following Pager (2003), the tester's criminal record was also signaled on his resumé by listing work experience at a state prison and by listing a parole officer as a reference.[1]

For both teams, employers were sampled from job listings for entry-level positions, defined as jobs requiring no previous experience and no education greater than high school. Jobs included restaurant positions, retail sales, warehouse work, couriers, telemarketers, customer service positions, clerical workers, stockers, movers, delivery drivers, and a wide range of other low-wage positions. Job listings were randomly drawn each week from the classified sections of the *New York Times*, *Daily News*, *New York Post*, *Village Voice*, and craigslist. The broad range of job listings allows for extensive coverage of the entry-level labor market in New York. From the available population of job listings, we took a simple random sample of advertisements each week. Testers in each team applied to each job within a twenty-four-hour period, randomly varying the order of the applicants. Our dependent variable recorded positive responses in which a tester was either offered a job or called back for a second interview. Callbacks were recorded by voice mail boxes set up for each tester. For more information about the research design and methods, see Pager, Western, and Bonikowski (2009).

Results

Two key findings emerge from the audit results. First, as in earlier research, a criminal record has a significant negative impact on hiring outcomes, even for applicants with otherwise appealing characteristics. Across teams, a criminal record reduces the likelihood of a callback or job offer by nearly 50 percent (28 vs. 15 percent). Second, the negative effect of a criminal conviction is substantially larger for blacks than for whites. As shown in Figure 1, the magnitude of the criminal record penalty suffered by black applicants (60 percent) is roughly double the size of the penalty for whites with a record (30 percent). This interaction between race and criminal record is large and statistically significant, which indicates that the penalty of a criminal record is more disabling for black job seekers than whites. The intensification of the criminal record effect among blacks is consistent with earlier audit research (Pager 2007) and points to special barriers facing blacks in the transition from prison to work. Employers, already reluctant to hire blacks, appear particularly wary of blacks with known criminal histories. In the remainder of this article, we examine the sequence of interactions that lead to this ultimate pattern of results. As job applicants pass from the point of application to an interview, and from an interview to an offer, we witness some of the underlying dynamics that may shape employers' decision making and result in the systematic disadvantage of blacks with criminal records.

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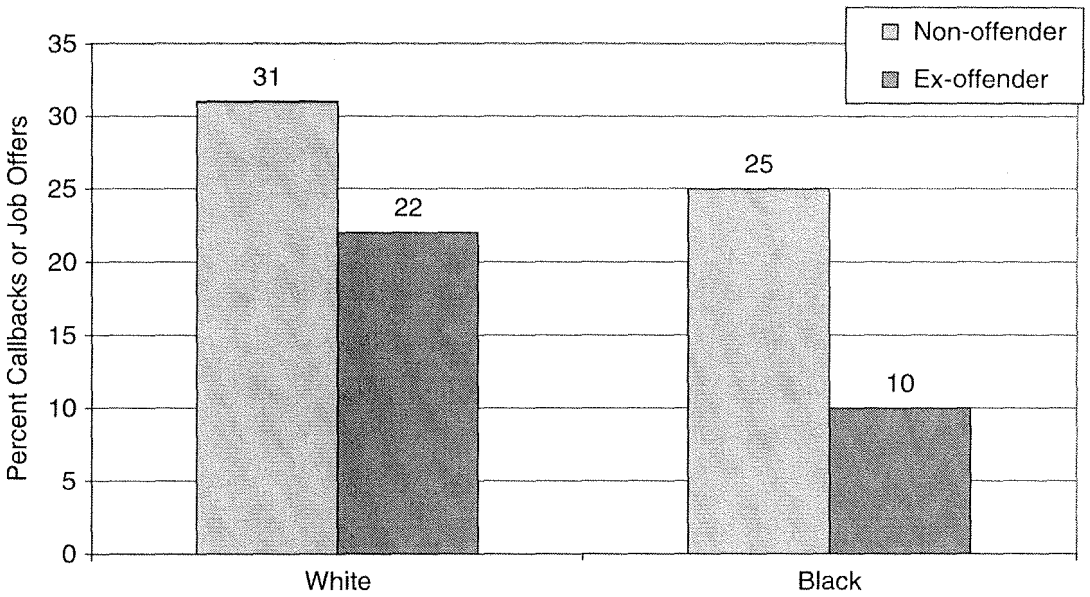
FIGURE 1
THE EFFECT OF RACE AND CRIMINAL BACKGROUND ON EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES



The importance of personal contact

One of the ways that job applicants can build rapport with employers is through the interview process. Though typically brief for low-wage jobs, interviews provide opportunities for applicants to demonstrate communication skills and commitment to work. For employers concerned about soft skills not reflected on a resumé, even a brief interaction can provide important information about the capacity of an applicant. Especially in the case of stigmatized applicants, personal contact may serve an important means of counteracting employers' initial stereotypes. As employers learn more about the person behind the category (e.g., ex-offender, black man), their comfort level with the applicant in question is likely to increase.

The evidence from our audit study indeed confirms that personal contact with an employer has a substantial impact on hiring outcomes. Restricting our sample to cases in which both team partners had the same level of contact with an employer, we find that testers who interact with employers are between four and six times more likely to receive a callback or job offer than those who do not; and personal contact reduces the effect of a criminal record by roughly 15 percent (see the appendix).[2] Personal contact thus seems to play an important role in mediating the effects of criminal stigma in the hiring process. At the same time,

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this pathway to rapport-building may not be equally available to all applicant types. Although all testers in the study were instructed to request to speak to the person in charge of hiring and to proceed as far as they could in the interview process, some met with more success than others. In particular, race has a significant effect on the likelihood of personal contact between applicant and employer, with blacks roughly a third less likely to have the opportunity to interact with employers ($p < .001$). Employers appear to be screening on the basis of race in deciding whom to allow to proceed from application to interview (see Figure 2). By contrast, the effect of a criminal record has no discernable impact on the likelihood of interaction. Given that a criminal record is typically unobserved until an employer has spoken with the candidate and/or reviewed his materials, it is not surprising that this is typically not the basis of an employer's decision to interview.

Personal contact . . . seems to play an important role in mediating the effects of criminal stigma in the hiring process. At the same time, this pathway to rapport-building may not be equally available to all applicant types.

The barriers that emerge in this very early stage of hiring are likely consequential for the disparities observed. With fewer opportunities for face-to-face contact with employers, black applicants are limited in their ability to demonstrate specific skills and attributes. Particularly in the case of black ex-offenders, for whom employers' concerns are likely particularly strong, limits on interaction reduce opportunities to contextualize a conviction or to demonstrate evidence of successful rehabilitation.

Quality of the interaction

Being granted an interview, or even a conversation, with the person in charge of hiring provides an important opportunity for establishing rapport. But the nature of that rapport also hinges upon what takes place during the interaction. Particularly for applicants with criminal records, the interview provides a key opportunity to assuage employers' concerns. In this respect, our testers had

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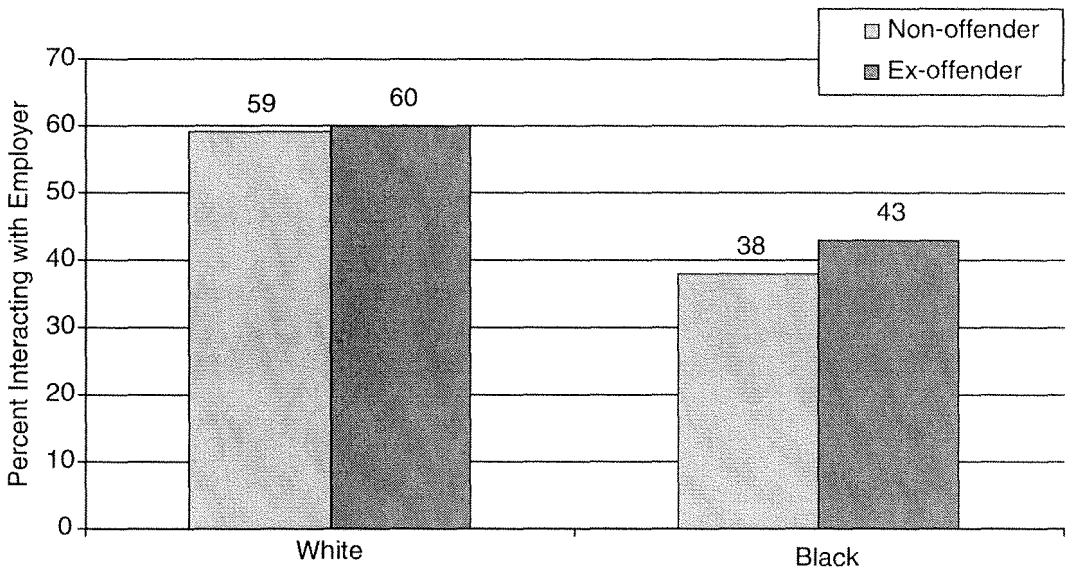
FIGURE 2
THE LIKELIHOOD OF PERSONAL CONTACT WITH EMPLOYER, BY RACE AND CRIMINAL BACKGROUND



mixed experiences. The testers had a set script that they were instructed to convey to employers about their prior drug conviction and their commitment to rehabilitation. In some cases, employers were extremely receptive to discussing these issues, while in others, employers seemed uncomfortable or unwilling to broach the subject. In one interaction, for example, an employer inquired about the most recent job listed on Kevin's resumé, which was at a correctional facility. Kevin reports,

> I thought she was asking me what I did to get in there. I said, "It was for drug possession." She said, "No, not that. That's none of my business."

The employer then quickly moved on to discuss Kevin's previous work experience. It is unclear from this interaction what lingering doubts the employer may have had about Kevin's criminal background, but Kevin did not have the chance to explain further.

In another case, Anthony, an African American tester, reports,

> As she looked over [my resumé] I could barely hear her say, "Oh, I see." I don't know what it was in response to, but it was pretty quick so I would guess it was my conviction. . . . She then just looked up at me and said, "I'll give you a call." It seemed like she ended it a bit abruptly.

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Some employers seemed uncertain about what was legally or socially appropriate to ask about prior convictions, and others seemed simply uncomfortable with the topic or considered it outside of the realm of employment-related concerns. In these cases, it is difficult to interpret the employers' response to the criminal background, and the applicant typically had less opportunity to account for the stigmatizing record or address employers' underlying concerns.

In other cases, employers' concerns about the criminal record are more transparent. Worries about legal liability, for example, came up in this interview with Chad, an African American tester:

> When I finished the application I was interviewed by . . . a large white man with a thick mustache. He shook my hand, invited me to have a seat, and began to look over my resumé. He said, "First, I need you to explain this . . . correctional facility and parole officer reference." I told him that I was convicted of a drug charge—possession with intent to sell. "I can't hire you," he said. He went on to explain that a lot of things can happen and the liability is too great. He said, "Let's say you got into a fight with a guy and you were in the right. The police come and run your background, yes, now you're in the wrong, even though you may have been right. It wouldn't be good for you and it wouldn't be good for us. I couldn't hire you."

Sometimes, employers' negative reactions are less explicit, but their concern over the prospect of hiring an ex-offender is clear nevertheless. For example, Kevin, a white tester, reports his experience at a specialty foods store:

> I noticed a sign on the door which read, "Help wanted, part-time, some experience." . . . A few minutes later a man came out. . . . He told me that he had a great part-time position [and] there could be some full-time positions opening [in] a while. He pointed at my... application . . . and said, "Why did you write parole?" I said that I was currently on parole. [He] then looked me in the eye and said, "Did you commit a crime?" I said yes. He then looked down at the sheet and said that he really wasn't hiring right now.

Kevin's conviction record seemed to catch the employer by surprise. Within seconds, the many signals pointing to a job opportunity (help-wanted sign, "great part-time positions," etc.) disappeared, as the employer decided he was no longer hiring, or at least not hiring Kevin.

Despite these unpleasant experiences, not all employers reacted negatively upon noticing a criminal record. In fact, on a number of occasions, testers encountered extremely sympathetic employers. For example, Kevin records his experience in applying for a job at a car dealership:

> He saw the correctional facility [on my resumé] and said, "We're an Equal Opportunity Employer. We don't care about this. About 75 percent of the people in this business have a record anyway."

Kevin describes the end of the interview:

> He said he was going to call me. Then he said, "I know what you are thinking. This asshole is never going to call me. I will call you. Not because you have good sales experience but just because you need a chance."

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This employer appears sympathetic to the plight of an ex-offender looking for work. In fact, the employer seems willing to privilege the desire to give Kevin a second chance over his need for workers with relevant experience. This employer called Kevin about the job two days later.

For employers who have ambivalent feelings about hiring ex-offenders, or who have anxieties about particular kinds of ex-offenders, interaction with the candidate allows the employer to interrogate these concerns directly.

To be sure, many of the sympathetic responses received by testers in the criminal record condition simply reflect the preexisting attitudes of employers, independent of the interaction. Employers who feel sympathetic toward ex-offenders are likely to express such sympathies in conversations with ex-offender applicants. But above and beyond employers' predispositions, we observe some evidence that the interaction itself can work to clarify and shape the employers' interpretation of the criminal record. For employers who have ambivalent feelings about hiring ex-offenders, or who have anxieties about particular kinds of ex-offenders, interaction with the candidate allows the employer to interrogate these concerns directly. In one case, for example, Keith, a white tester, has an extended conversation with the manager at a furniture rental store:

> After finishing the application I brought it back to [the employer], along with my resumé. He invited me to take off my backpack and have a seat. He began looking over the res./app. and his first question was, "Were you selling or using?" I told him, "Using. It was a minor thing. A stupid mistake and I'm now clean." He was sympathetic saying, "I gotcha. It was a question, not a criticism." [The employer then asked him a few questions about his driver's license and driving history.] He invited me to sit with him out at the door while he smoked. When we got there he informally sat me down and lit up. He turned to me and said, "So why should I hire you instead of one of the forty-seven other guys I got coming to me?" I told him, "I'll work hard for you, bust my ass. It's a condition of my parole that I work." He said, "But do you want to work?" I answered, "Yeah, I'm looking to get back into society . . ." He interrupted, "You want to get your shit together." "Yeah," I said. . . . The conversation ended with him saying, "My inclination is to say yes" (regarding hiring me). He added, "My bosses, the owners, are a little more close-minded than me. . . . Look, you paid, you don't have to pay for it the rest of your fucking life. People make mistakes. I'll get you my card."

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This employer expresses some open-mindedness about Keith's criminal background from the start ("It was a question, not a criticism") but also wants evidence that taking a chance on Keith would be warranted amid the large pool of candidates. The conversation seems to provide important reassurances to the employer, who ends the interview with an encouraging note.

In another case, Anthony, an African American tester, discusses his criminal background with the manager of a health care company:

> [The employer] said, "I'm sure people must take double-takes [when they see the correctional facility]." I replied, "Yeah, that does happen sometimes." He told me that he knows the law, says I have to provide that information to a possible employer, but not to worry because he has had other employees who have "fucked up in the past." He said, "I feel safer knowing you're telling me up front than me having to wonder if you're gonna come here and tear shit up. Let's face it, interviews are bullshit. You can't know someone from a five-minute interview. So let's cut to the chase."
>
> "How long were you in?" (Eighteen months)
>
> "When'd you get out?" (A few weeks ago)
>
> "Ok, so you're fresh out and trying to get back on track?" (Yes, I am)
>
> "What'd you do?" (I had a small amount of drugs on me)
>
> "So you were guilty?" (Yes, I was young and made some mistakes but I learned from them and am completely drug-free)
>
> [Jokingly] "So you weren't innocent?" (No, it was my fault.)
>
> "Don't worry, I find that those that messed up and want to set things right are better workers."

In this interaction the employer does acknowledge certain concerns about hiring someone with a record but seems to respond favorably to Anthony's honesty and, after learning more of the details of Anthony's background, offers him an encouraging response.

Thus, while a criminal record has a significant negative impact on employment prospects of job seekers, some employers are willing to look beyond the conviction, or to downplay its significance in the context of other information acquired during the interview. In these cases, a kind of empathy seems to develop between employer and job seeker, with goodwill often translating into a substantial improvement in employment prospects. Of course, the types of individualizing information employers look to are not always in the applicants' control. Race and ethnicity, in particular, appear to affect some employers' interpretations of the seriousness of the criminal background and the depth of empathy generated by the interaction. For example, Keith, a white tester, reports on his interaction with the manager of a restaurant supply company:

> [The employer] sat me down and went over my application and resumé. He first saw [the correctional facility] and asked about my working there. I told him that I had been incarcerated. In a lower voice he said, "What did you do?" I told him about my being caught with cocaine, my time served, my current sobriety, which my parole officer could verify, the fact that it was a mistake and I had learned my lesson. At this point he said, "Zarriello . . . what is that, Italian?" I said, "Yes," and could immediately tell he was

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> now on my side. He asked more questions like, "What happened exactly?" I told him I was in a car with some ex-friends that was pulled over and we were all searched and they found six grams in my possession. He asked, "You come from a nice Italian family? What do your parents think about this?" I told him they were disappointed but thought I had learned my lesson. He told me that "people make mistakes." He went on to say, "It would make me feel good to help a guy like you, more than just the rewards of doing my job, but good as a person if I can help someone."

This employer's emphasis on the value of second chances and the desire to help a young ex-offender get back on his feet are similar to sympathetic reactions we heard from other employers in interactions with both black and white testers. Here, though, we see the employer explicitly invoke Keith's ethnic background as the basis for solidarity and as a key turning point in the employer's reaction to the criminal background information, as Keith moves from being viewed as an ex-offender to someone from a "nice Italian family."

In a similar case, Kevin applied for a job with a staffing agency and was asked a number of detailed questions about his criminal history. Toward the end of the interview, Kevin reports,

> [The employer] said, "Do you have Irish in you?" I said, "On my mother's side I do." He asked what else I have. I said, "French." He was delighted! He said he has Irish and French in him, too. He said we could be related because we are both from FrIreland [France and Ireland]. I said yes and laughed with him.

Kevin concluded his report by offering his impression of the interaction: "He really wanted to help me out and seemed to be going to great lengths to find me a job."

Once again, the ethnic solidarity expressed in this interaction appears to help establish a positive rapport between candidate and employer. Conversations with employers thus simultaneously offer the opportunity to present personalizing information about the applicant's work ethic and commitment to rehabilitation but may also generate new bases for categorical distinctions.

Employers thus appear to offer a range of reactions to ex-offender applicants, varying in terms of employers' comfort level in discussing criminal backgrounds and their evaluative assessments of this information. To examine employers' responses more systematically, we coded tester interactions with employers according to the nature of their response to the criminal record information, based on narrative data provided by the testers. Focusing on testers with criminal records who had personal contact with employers (roughly 50 percent of all tests), we code responses as "ambiguous or no response," "negative response," and "sympathetic response."

Looking to the results in Figure 3, we see that overall employers are most likely to avoid talking about the conviction altogether. Between two-thirds and three-quarters of employers either avoided the subject of the criminal record altogether or gave little indication of how they viewed the information. By contrast, less than 10 percent of employers made explicitly negative comments.

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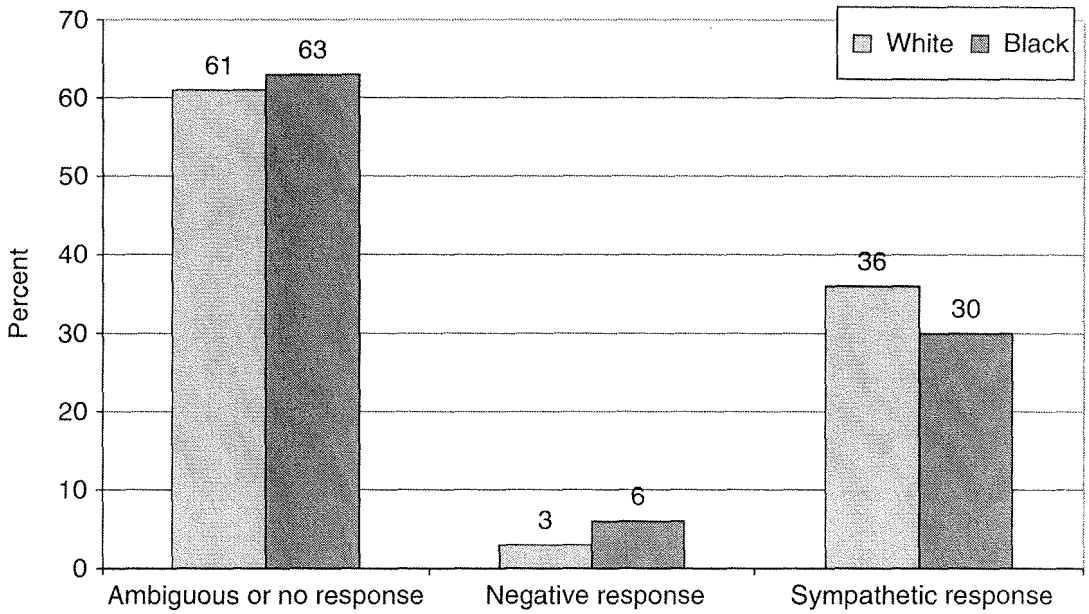
FIGURE 3
EMPLOYER REACTION TO CRIMINAL RECORD, BY RACE OF APPLICANT



Although the hiring outcomes from the audit study indicate a large negative impact of a criminal record on employers' evaluations, we see little of this reflected in their explicit comments to job applicants. If expressing a clear valence, employers are more likely to offer sympathetic reactions, with roughly 35 percent of employers coded as sympathetic toward the ex-offender applicant.[3] We see some evidence that blacks are more likely to receive a negative response (6 vs. 3 percent) and less likely to receive a sympathetic response (30 vs. 36 percent), though these differences are not statistically significant. Overall, these results point to a reluctance among employers to address the criminal record issue head-on, or to reveal their reaction to the record to the applicant in question. Our final question, then, considers the extent to which these differential responses in interaction correspond to differences in hiring outcomes.

Relationship between type of interaction and employment outcomes

The nature of interaction between employer and applicant is significant primarily to the extent that it proves consequential for hiring. Matching interaction experiences with employment outcomes provides some leverage on the pathways through which ex-offenders find opportunity. Figure 4 presents the percentage

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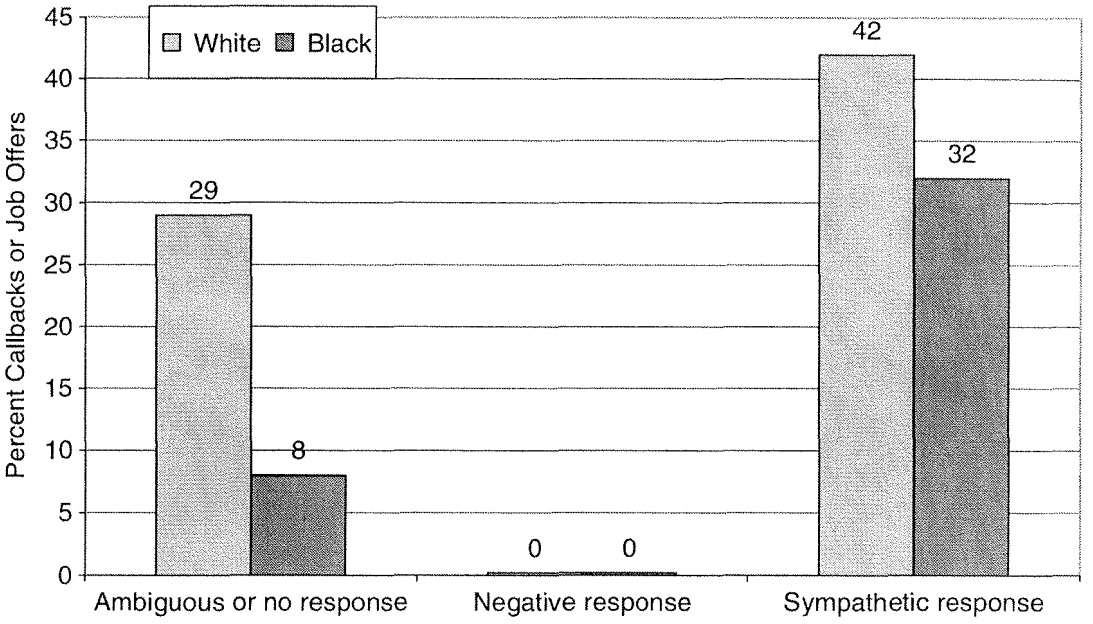
FIGURE 4
THE LIKELIHOOD OF A CALLBACK OR JOB OFFER, BY RACE AND INTERACTION TYPE



of applicants with criminal records who received a callback or job offer, by race of the applicant and type of employer response. Not surprisingly, employment outcomes are most favorable among those who received a sympathetic response from employers. These employers are not simply paying lip service to the value of second chances but demonstrate an actual willingness to hire ex-offenders. Among those who receive sympathetic responses from employers, whites are more likely to receive an actual callback or job offer (42 vs. 32 percent), although this difference is not statistically significant.

Showing even more consistency between interactions and outcomes, employers who express negative reactions to applicants with criminal records in no cases made offers or callbacks to these applicants. The group with less consistent results includes employers who offer no reaction or ambiguous reactions to the criminal background. Among these employers, we see a large racial difference in outcomes, with white applicants roughly three times more likely to receive a callback or job offer relative to blacks who have similar encounters (29 vs. 8 percent). Relative to those who receive a sympathetic response, the penalty associated with limited or no discussion about the criminal record is roughly 30 percent

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for whites; for blacks, this limited interaction appears far more consequential, resulting in 75 percent fewer callbacks or job offers relative to those who received a sympathetic reaction. Though we cannot directly interpret employers' underlying reactions, this evidence is consistent with the role of stereotypes inhibiting the acquisition and impact of personalizing information. If employers who are concerned about the record among black applicants choose to remain silent about the issue, the applicant then has little opportunity to anticipate or address the employer's concerns. Where for white ex-offenders this reduced communication does not appear overly consequential, black ex-offenders seem to face substantially lower employment prospects as a result.

Conclusion

The results of this study show a strong reluctance among employers to hire applicants with criminal records, especially when considering black ex-offenders. Despite the many appealing personal characteristics of our testers, employers often appear to base their decisions on the more salient markers of race and criminal background. What is perhaps more noteworthy in these data relates to the cases in which testers with criminal backgrounds *are* given a chance at employment. Employment prospects improve significantly for applicants who have a chance to interact with the hiring manager, and more so among those who elicit sympathetic responses in the course of those interactions. Surely, some of this variation is attributable to preexisting characteristics and preferences of the employers, with little or no effect of personal contact. Employers who are eager to hire will be more likely to meet with applicants on the spot, and those who are sympathetic toward ex-offenders will be more likely to express such sentiments in the course of interaction. Still, we suspect that the interaction itself plays a nontrivial role in this hiring process. Employers have many reasons to be concerned about applicants with prior histories of incarceration. Concerns about theft, violence, and drug use are all relevant, not to mention the more mundane concerns over worker reliability and performance. Personal contact with an applicant cannot reveal all of these issues but can help to provide some signals as to the disposition of the applicant and can help the employer develop a "gut feeling" about whether this individual is likely to diverge from the stereotype of the ex-con.

Unfortunately, the ability to have such a hearing does not appear available to all applicants. Blacks are significantly less likely to be invited to interview by employers, offering them fewer opportunities to present indicators at odds with their stigmatized group membership. Furthermore, although the distribution of reactions from employers is roughly similar among black and white applicants with criminal backgrounds, actual employment outcomes differ for those who have little opportunity to discuss their criminal record: among whites, these limited interactions are not overly consequential; whereas for blacks, job opportunities appear substantially reduced.

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These findings must be contextualized in light of the sampling design of the study, which focused exclusively on jobs obtained through formal classified listings. Given that many job seekers find employment through social networks and other informal channels, our analysis may understate opportunities for personal contact made possible through mediated contacts. However, evidence on social networks in employment suggests racialized consequences of these pathways as well, with blacks less likely to obtain quality leads to employment from their networks relative to similarly situated whites (cf. Royster 2003). Racial disparities in access to social networks have also been shown in the case of ex-offenders (Sullivan 1989). These informal methods of job search behavior, therefore, may result in greater evidence of racial disparities in employment following incarceration than what is reported here.

Overall, these findings point to the importance of rapport-building in the employment process, particularly for applicants with stigmatizing characteristics. In light of these findings, policy intervention should aim to defuse stigma and provide employers with more information about their prospective workers. Initiatives that facilitate the matching of workers with employers in ways that help to overcome these initial barriers may have a substantial impact. Job referral services that act as labor market intermediaries who vouch for job applicants represent one important policy approach to bridging this divide. Certificates of rehabilitation and public education campaigns might also weaken the effects of stereotyping.

As incarceration rates have increased over the past few decades, official criminality compounds the stigma of race and deepens the economic disadvantage of young African American men. Instead of merely adding to the deficits of low-skill black men, a criminal record modifies the effect of racial discrimination, which raises the bar to employment higher for blacks than similarly situated whites. In this context, we can understand the growth of incarceration rates, and the racial disparities that characterize them, as producing a new form of institutional racism with wide-reaching economic effects.

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APPENDIX

THE EFFECT OF PERSONAL CONTACT ON THE LIKELIHOOD OF A CALLBACK/JOB OFFER AND THE MAGNITUDE OF CRIMINAL STIGMA

	No Interaction with Employer				Both Testers Interacted with Employer				
	No Record (NR)	Criminal Record (CR)	Ratio 1 (NR/CR)	*n*	NR	CR	Ratio 2 (NR/CR)	*n*	Percentage Change in CR Effect
White	8.82	5.88	1.50	34	44.44	35.19	1.26	54	–0.16
Black	10.00	2.82	3.55	70	41.86	13.95	3.00	43	–0.15

NOTE: First two columns of each section represent rates of positive response (callback/job offer) for testers by race and criminal status. Percentage change in the effect of a criminal record (final column) is calculated as: (ratio 1 – ratio 2)/ratio 1.

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Notes

1. Results from Pager (2003) suggest that providing information about a criminal record to employers who do not request the information does little to affect hiring decisions. Those employers who request the information are those most likely to use it.

2. We restrict our sample here to cases in which both testers on a team received the same level of personal contact to better control for compositional differences between those employers more or less likely to interview candidates on the spot. By comparing the effect of a criminal record within teams where either both or neither tester interacts with the employer, we can better understand the ways in which personal contact may mediate the effects of stigma. This sample restriction has little effect on the substantive conclusions of the analysis.

3. This proportion corresponds closely with the 33 percent of urban employers surveyed by Holzer (1996, 59) who report that they would "probably accept" or "definitely accept" an applicant with a criminal background.

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Discrimination in a Low-Wage Labor Market: A Field Experiment

Devah Pager
Princeton University

Bruce Western
Harvard University

Bart Bonikowski
Princeton University

Decades of racial progress have led some researchers and policymakers to doubt that discrimination remains an important cause of economic inequality. To study contemporary discrimination, we conducted a field experiment in the low-wage labor market of New York City, recruiting white, black, and Latino job applicants who were matched on demographic characteristics and interpersonal skills. These applicants were given equivalent résumés and sent to apply in tandem for hundreds of entry-level jobs. Our results show that black applicants were half as likely as equally qualified whites to receive a callback or job offer. In fact, black and Latino applicants with clean backgrounds fared no better than white applicants just released from prison. Additional qualitative evidence from our applicants' experiences further illustrates the multiple points at which employment trajectories can be deflected by various forms of racial bias. These results point to the subtle yet systematic forms of discrimination that continue to shape employment opportunities for low-wage workers.

Despite legal bans on discrimination and the liberalization of racial attitudes since the 1960s, racial differences in employment remain among the most enduring forms of economic inequality. Even in the tight labor market of the late 1990s, unemployment rates for black men remained twice that for whites. Racial inequality in total joblessness—including those who exited the labor market—increased among young men during this period (Holzer and Offner 2001). Against this backdrop of persistent racial inequality, the question of employment discrimination has generated renewed interest. Although there is much research on racial disparities in employment, the contemporary relevance of discrimination remains widely contested.

One line of research points to the persistence of prejudice and discrimination as a critical factor shaping contemporary racial disparities (Darity and Mason 1998; Roscigno et al. 2007). A series of studies relying on surveys and in-depth interviews finds that firms are reluctant to hire young minority men—especially blacks—because they are seen as unreliable, dishonest, or lacking in social or cognitive skills (Holzer 1996; Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991; Moss and Tilly 2001; Waldinger and Lichter 2003; Wilson 1996: chap. 5). The strong negative attitudes expressed by employers suggest that race remains highly

Direct all correspondence to Devah Pager, Department of Sociology, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08544 (pager@princeton.edu). This research has been supported by grants from the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Justice, the JEHT Foundation, the Princeton Research Institute on the Region, and the Industrial Relations Section of Princeton University. The first author acknowledges generous support from NSF CAREER, NIH K01, and a W.T. Grant Scholars Award. We also gratefully acknowledge the support of the New York City Commission on Human Rights, and Commissioner Patricia Gatling. Thanks to Glenn Martin, Don Green, and the many workshop participants who provided generous feedback on earlier drafts of this article.

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salient in employers' evaluations of workers. At the same time, research relying on interviews with employers leaves uncertain the degree to which self-reported attitudes are influential in actual hiring decisions (Pager and Quillian 2005). Indeed, Moss and Tilly (2001:151) report the puzzling finding that "businesses where a plurality of managers complained about black motivation are more likely to hire black men." In fact, across a series of analyses controlling for firm size, starting wage, the percent black in the relevant portion of the metropolitan area, and a business's average distance from black residents in the area, Moss and Tilly find that employers who overtly criticize the hard skills or interaction skills of black workers are between two and four times more likely to hire a black worker (pp.151–52). Hiring decisions, of course, are influenced by a complex range of factors, racial attitudes being only one. Employers' stated preferences do not provide a clear picture of the degree to which negative attitudes about blacks translate into active forms of discrimination.

Research focusing on wages rather than employment offers even less evidence of contemporary discrimination. Neal and Johnson (1996), for example, estimate wage differences between white, black, and Latino young men. They find that two thirds of the black-white gap in wages in 1990 to 1991 can be explained by race differences in cognitive test scores measured 11 years earlier, and test scores fully explain wage differences between whites and Latinos. This and similar studies trace the employment problems of young minority men primarily to skill or other individual deficiencies, rather than any direct effect of discrimination (Farkas and Vicknair 1996; Neal and Johnson 1996; O'Neill 1990). Heckman (1998:101–102) puts the point most clearly, writing that "most of the disparity in earnings between blacks and whites in the labor market of the 1990s is due to differences in skills they bring to the market, and not to discrimination within the labor market." He goes on to describe labor market discrimination as "the problem of an earlier era."

Does employer discrimination continue to affect labor market outcomes for minority workers? Clear answers are elusive because discrimination is hard to measure. Without observing actual hiring decisions, it is difficult to assess exactly how and under what conditions race shapes employer behavior. We address this issue with a field experiment that allows direct observation of employer decision making. By presenting equally qualified applicants who differ only by race or ethnicity, we can observe the degree to which racial considerations affect real hiring decisions. Furthermore, we move beyond experimental estimates of discrimination to explore the *processes* by which discrimination occurs. Examining the interactions between job seekers and employers, we gain new insights into how race influences employers' perceptions of job candidate quality and desirability. Studying the multifaceted character of discrimination highlights the range of decisions that collectively reduce opportunities for minority candidates.

CONCEPTUALIZING DISCRIMINATION

Empirical studies often portray discrimination as a single decision. Research on employment disparities, for example, considers the role of discrimination at the point of initial hire; research on pay disparities considers discrimination at the point of wage-setting decisions. In reality, discrimination may occur at multiple decision points across the employment relationship. In this way, even relatively small episodes of discrimination—when experienced at multiple intervals or across multiple contexts—can have substantial effects on aggregate outcomes.

Depictions of discriminators also often portray the labor market as divided neatly between employers with a "taste for discrimination" and those who are indifferent to race (Becker 1957). Consequently, it is suggested, job seekers can avoid discrimination by sorting themselves into sectors of the labor market where discrimination is less likely to occur (Heckman 1998:103). Fryer and Levitt (2003:5) characterize employers according to a similar dichotomy, with applicants best advised to identify and avoid employers prone to discrimination, rather than wasting time pursuing job opportunities among firms unwilling to hire them: "In the face of discriminatory employers, it is actually in the interest of both employee and employers for Blacks to signal race, either via a name or other résumé information, rather than undertaking a costly

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interview with little hope of receiving a job offer." According to this conceptualization of labor market discrimination, racial preferences or biases are fixed and concentrated among a specific subset of employers.

Other evidence challenges this tidy distinction between employers who do and do not discriminate. Alternative formulations of labor market discrimination encourage us to view the process as more interactive, contextual, and widespread. Theories of both statistical discrimination and stereotypes view race as a heuristic employers use to evaluate job applicants about whom little is known. Here, group-based generalizations provide guidance about the expected profile of individuals from a given group and facilitate decision making when information or time are scarce (Aigner and Cain 1977; Fiske 1998). Heuristics of this kind are pervasive (and often unconscious). Their effects may vary depending on the availability of and attention to person-specific information (such as that conveyed through application materials or in an interview) that may interact with and potentially override initial expectations.

A long line of social psychological research investigates how stereotypes give way to individualizing information, as well as the conditions under which stereotypes demonstrate a stubborn resistance to change (Bodenhausen 1988; Fiske 1998; Trope and Thomson 1997).[1] This research suggests that salient personalizing information can quickly counteract stereotyped expectations; however, in evaluating difficult-to-observe or ambiguously relevant characteristics, or when decision makers have competing demands on their attention, stereotypes often filter information in ways that preserve expectations (Darley and Gross 1983; Dovidio and Gaertner 2000; Gilbert and Hixon 1991). In these cases of decision making under uncertainty, racial preferences or biases are unlikely to be expressed in any static or uniform way, but will vary in intensity and consequence depending on other characteristics of the applicant, the employer, and the interaction between the two.

[1] Theories of statistical discrimination also predict employer responsiveness to individual characteristics (e.g., Altonji and Pierret 2001; Oettinger 1996; cf. Pager and Karafin 2009).

In addition to noting the varying role of race across employment interactions, some research shifts the focus from employer characteristics to the characteristics of the job for which a given worker is being considered. Previous research points to the negative consequences of the changing composition of low-wage jobs for black men, with the shift from manufacturing to services skewing the distribution of skill demands toward "soft skills," for which black men are considered lacking (Moss and Tilly 2001). Jobs involving customer service or contact with clients heighten the salience of race because of employers' concerns about the dress and demeanor of young black men (Moss and Tilly 2001). Jobs at the "back of the house" or those emphasizing manual skills are less likely to activate concerns of this kind. In this scenario, discrimination may obtain not at the employer level but at the job level, with black applicants excluded from some job types and channeled into others. In this case, we would look to variation in discrimination not among employers but among the job openings for which workers are being considered.

Rather than viewing discrimination as a single decision, or as the result of a small group of highly prejudiced employers, a growing body of research points to the variable contexts that shape how information about applicants may be filtered and interpreted along racial lines. Decision making under uncertainty and the race-typing of jobs both make discrimination more likely. To capture the contingent and cumulative effects of discrimination implied by these theories requires an examination of how experiences of discrimination may be distributed across a wide range of decision points and may vary depending on interactions among the employer, the applicant, and the job in question.

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF LOW-WAGE LABOR MARKETS

Economic theory predicts the decline of discrimination through market competition (Becker 1957), but several features of contemporary low-wage labor markets may sustain or renew racialized decision making. Shifts in the composition of both low-wage jobs and workers have potentially created new incentives and opportunities for employers to enact racial preferences in hiring. First, low-wage job growth is

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concentrated in service industries, in positions that place a heavy emphasis on self-presentation, interaction with customers, and other personality-related attributes (Moss and Tilly 2001). As discussed earlier, employers consistently express concerns over the "soft skills" of black men, implying a potential skills mismatch between the skill requirements of new job growth and the perceived skill profile of black male job seekers. Furthermore, because many of the qualities valued by employers for contemporary low-wage jobs are difficult to evaluate from a written application or brief meeting, generalized negative perceptions of minority workers may be more difficult for individual minority applicants to disconfirm (Biernat and Kobrynowicz 1997).

Second, low-wage labor markets today are characterized by increasing heterogeneity of the urban minority work force, with low-skill black workers now more likely to compete with other minority groups—in particular, low-skill Latino workers. Interviews with employers in Los Angeles and Chicago suggest consistent preferences for Latinos over blacks, with Latino workers viewed as more pliant, reliable, and hard-working (Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Given these racial preferences among employers, growing competition within the low-wage labor market may leave black men vulnerable to discrimination relative not only to whites, but to Latinos as well.

Finally, low-wage labor markets are increasingly supplied by workers with criminal records. Nearly a third of black men without a college degree have prison records by their mid-30s, adding to employers' reservations about black male job applicants (Pager 2007b; Pettit and Western 2004). The high rate of incarceration makes a criminal record a newly important source of stigma that is worth studying in its own right. Moreover, we can view a criminal record as an extreme and authoritative signal of the kinds of problematic behaviors that employers ascribe to young black men. In this context, separating the effects of criminal stigma from race provides a useful benchmark for measuring racial stigma. In the first effort in this direction, Pager's (2003) research in a Milwaukee field experiment compared racial and criminal stigma among matched pairs of job seekers. Fielding a pair of black and a pair of white job applicants (in which one member of each pair was randomly assigned a criminal record), Pager found that a black applicant with no criminal background experiences job prospects similar to those of a white felon. That blackness confers the same disadvantage as a felony conviction helps calibrate the deeply skeptical view of young black men in the eyes of Milwaukee employers.

The growing importance of soft skills, ethnic heterogeneity, and job seekers with criminal records suggest the persistence or increasing incidence of discrimination in contemporary low-wage labor markets. Whether based on statistical generalizations or inaccurate stereotypes, preconceived notions about the characteristics or desirability of black men relative to other applicant types are likely to structure the distribution of opportunity along racial lines.

METHODS FOR STUDYING LABOR MARKET DISCRIMINATION

Racial discrimination in the labor market is typically studied by comparing the wages of whites and minorities, statistically controlling for human capital characteristics. Estimates from a variety of social surveys suggest that the black-white difference in hourly wages among men usually range between about 10 and 20 percent (Cancio, Evans, and Maume 1996; Darity and Meyers 1998; Neal and Johnson 1996). Although widely used, this residual method, in which discrimination is defined as the unexplained race difference in wages, is sensitive to the measurement of human capital. Where race differences in human capital are incompletely observed, the effect of discrimination may be overestimated (Farkas and Vicknair 1996; Neal and Johnson 1996).

Residual estimates of discrimination infer employer behavior from data on workers' wages. Field experiments, by contrast, offer a more direct approach to the measurement of discrimination. This approach, also referred to as an audit methodology, involves the use of matched teams of job applicants—called testers—who apply to real job openings and record responses from employers. Testers are assigned equivalent résumés and are matched on a variety of characteristics like age, education, physical appearance, and interpersonal skills.

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Because black and white testers are sent to the same firms, and testers are matched on a wide variety of characteristics, much of the unexplained variation that confounds residual estimates of discrimination is experimentally controlled.

In part due to taxing logistical requirements, the use of in-person audit studies of employment remains rare, with only a handful of such studies conducted over the past 20 years (Bendick, Jackson, and Reinoso 1994; Bendick et al. 1991; Cross et al. 1990; Pager 2003; Turner, Fix, and Struyk 1991).[2] Moreover, the typical emphasis on a single comparison group leaves several significant features of contemporary urban labor markets unexplored.

By studying both race and criminal background, the Milwaukee audit study represents an important starting point for this project (Pager 2003). The Milwaukee study examined the influence of the criminal justice system on labor market stratification by studying the effect of a criminal record for black and white job seekers. Although race emerged as a key theme in the study's findings, the topic of racial discrimination was not a central focus. Moreover, the research design yielded only indirect evidence of racial discrimination because black and white testers did not apply to the same employers. Our ability to investigate when and how racial discrimination occurs is therefore limited in this context.

The current study updates and extends earlier research in several ways. First, we focus directly on the question of racial discrimination, in both conceptualization and design. This emphasis allows us to situate our research within ongoing debates about discrimination and to provide a rigorous design for detecting racial discrimination. Second, we move beyond standard two-race models of discrimination by including matched black, white, and Latino job seekers, reflecting the racial heterogeneity of large urban labor markets. To our knowledge, this is the first study of its kind to simultaneously examine the employment experiences of three racial/ethnic groups. Third, to help calibrate the magnitude of racial preferences, we compare applicants affected by varying forms of stigma; specifically, we compare minority applicants with white applicants just released from prison. Where the Milwaukee study attempted this comparison across teams, the present analysis provides a direct test by comparing the outcomes of minority and ex-offender applicants who visit the same employers. Finally, we extend our analysis from the quantitative evidence of differential treatment to a rich set of qualitative data that allow for an exploration of the process of discrimination. Drawing from the testers' extensive field notes that describe their interactions with employers, we provide a unique window into the range of employer responses that characterize discrimination in contemporary low-wage labor markets.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The New York City Hiring Discrimination Study sent matched teams of testers to apply for 340 real entry-level jobs throughout New York City over nine months in 2004. The testers were well-spoken, clean-cut young men, ages 22 to 26. Most were college-educated, between 5 feet 10 inches and 6 feet in height, and recruited in and around New York City. They were matched on the basis of their verbal skills, interactional styles (level of eye contact, demeanor, and verbosity), and physical attractiveness. Testers were assigned fictitious résumés indicating identical educational attainment and comparable qualities of high school, work experience (quantity and kind), and neighborhood of residence. Résumés were prepared in different fonts and formats and randomly varied across testers, with each résumé used by testers from each race group. Testers presented themselves as high school graduates with steady work experience in entry-level jobs. Finally, the testers passed a common training program to ensure uniform behavior in job interviews. While in the field, the testers dressed similarly and communicated with teammates by cell phone to anticipate unusual interview situations.

We fielded two teams that each included a white, Latino, and black tester. To help ensure

[2] For a summary of the results of earlier audit studies of employment, see Heckman and Siegelman (1993) and Pager (2007a). Correspondence studies, which rely on résumés sent by mail rather than in-person applications (e.g., Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004), are less costly but rely on application procedures less suited for low-wage labor markets (which typically require in-person applications).

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comparability, the Latino testers spoke in unaccented English, were U.S. citizens of Puerto Rican descent, and, like the other testers, claimed no Spanish language ability. The first team tests a standard racial hierarchy, with the white tester serving as a benchmark against which to measure variation in racial and ethnic discrimination. To calibrate the magnitude of racial stigma, the second team compares black and Latino testers with a white tester with a criminal record. The criminal record was typically disclosed in answer to the standard question on employment applications, "Have you ever been convicted of a crime? If yes, please explain." We instructed testers to reveal, when asked, that they had recently been released from prison after serving 18 months for a drug felony (possession with intent to distribute, cocaine). In addition, following Pager (2003), the white tester's criminal record was also signaled on the résumé by listing work experience at a state prison and by listing a parole officer as a reference.[3]

For both teams, we sampled employers from job listings for entry-level positions, defined as jobs requiring little previous experience and no more than a high school degree. Job titles included restaurant jobs, retail sales, warehouse workers, couriers, telemarketers, customer service positions, clerical workers, stockers, movers, delivery drivers, and a wide range of other low-wage positions. Each week, we randomly drew job listings from the classified sections of the *New York Times, Daily News, New York Post, Village Voice,* and the online service Craigslist. The broad range of job listings allowed for extensive coverage of the entry-level labor market in New York. From the available population of job listings, we took a simple random sample of advertisements each week. Testers in each team applied to each job within a 24-hour period, randomly varying the order of the applicants.

Our dependent variable records any positive response in which a tester was either offered a job or called back for a second interview. We recorded callbacks using voicemail boxes set up for each tester. For employer i ($i = 1, \ldots, N$) and tester t ($t = W, B,$ or L for white, black, or Latino), a positive response, y_{it}, is a binary variable that scores 1 for a job offer or callback, and 0 otherwise. We define the level of differential treatment as the ratio in positive response rates for each comparison, $r_{WB} = \bar{y}_W / \bar{y}_B$, where $\bar{y}_t$ is the proportion of positive responses for testers of race t. Under the null hypothesis of equal treatment, $r_{WB} = 1$, the proportion of positive responses received by each racial group is equal. For data on matched pairs, several statistical tests have been proposed that use within-pair comparisons to account for the correlation of observations from the same pair (e.g., Agresti 1990; Heckman and Siegelman 1993). In our case, where three testers are sent to the same employer, we have a matched triplet and information from all three testers should ideally contribute to an inference about a contrast between any two. Ghosh and colleagues (2000) suggest that matched pairs can be fit with a hierarchical logistic regression with a random effect for each pair. We generalize their approach to our matched triplets, fitting a random effect for each employer. If the probability of a positive response is given by $E(y_{it}) = p_{it}$, the hierarchical model is written

$$\log\left(\frac{p_{it}}{1-p_{it}}\right) = \alpha_i + \beta B_{it} + \gamma L_{it},$$

where B_{it} is a dummy variable for blacks, L_{it} is a dummy variable for Latinos, and the random effects for employers, α_i, is given a normal distribution. The employer effects, α_i, induce a correlation among observations from the same employers and reduce standard errors, as in the usual matched-pair inference. We estimate the models with Markov Chain Monte Carlo methods. We construct intervals for the ratios (r_{WB}, r_{WL}, and r_{BL}) by taking random draws from the posterior predictive distribution of y_{it}. Alternative methods that adjust for clustering by employer yield similar results to those reported below.

The Problems of Matching

The quality of audit results depends on the comparability of the testers. Because race cannot be experimentally assigned, researchers must rely on effective selection and matching to construct audit teams in which all relevant characteristics

[3] Results from Pager (2003) suggest that providing information about a criminal record to employers who do not request the information does little to affect hiring decisions.

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of testers are similar—something that may leave substantial room for bias. Heckman and Siegelman (1993) argue that researchers know little about the hard-to-observe characteristics highly prized by employers. If testers are poorly matched, evidence of discrimination may be merely an artifact of idiosyncratic tester characteristics.

Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) remove tester effects in a "correspondence test" that sent résumés with common white and black names to employers in Boston and Chicago. Their design allows the random assignment of résumé characteristics to white- and black-sounding names, largely removing concerns about unobserved characteristics. Résumés with white names were 50 percent more likely than those with black names to receive callbacks from employers (9.7 versus 6.5 percent). Studies of this kind provide some reassurance that results from the body of audit research are not driven by tester effects alone.

Because we rely on in-person audits for our study of low-wage labor markets, the effective matching of testers is a key concern.[4] We reviewed more than 300 applicants to identify our final team of 10 testers.[5] Successful applicants were subject to two lengthy screening interviews and a written test, a far more probing job selection process than the testers encountered in their fieldwork.[6] Each tester passed a standard training period, was required to dress uniformly, and was subject to periodic spot checks for quality control.[7]

Despite these measures, uncontrolled tester effects remain a threat to inferences about discrimination. We assess the sensitivity of our results to testers in four ways. First, each tester may have a unique effect, but the average effect of the testers may be zero. In this case, the observations from each tester will be correlated and standard errors that ignore this clustering will tend to be too small. We allow for this possibility by fitting an additional random effect for each tester in our hierarchical logistic regression.[8] Second, each tester may have a unique effect, but these effects may not average to zero. To assess the sensitivity of our results to each tester, we perform a type of cross-validation in which the treatment effect is recalculated for a reduced data set, sequentially omitting those employers associated with each individual tester. Confidence intervals below are based on models that include employer and tester random effects. We compare these results with cross-validation treatment effects based on subsets of the data in which individual testers are sequentially omitted. Third, we recalculate our key results for each unique combination of testers matched in teams over the course of the fieldwork (see Appendix, Table A2). These results, although sensitive to small sample sizes for some combinations, tend to support the consistency of effects across a number of tester comparisons.

As a final investigation of tester effects, we consider the possibility that the expectations or behaviors of testers may influence the audit results in nonrandom ways. For example, if a black tester expects to be treated poorly by

[4] In-person audits also allow for the inclusion of a wide range of entry-level job types (which often require in-person applications); they provide a clear method for signaling race, without concerns over the class-connotations of racially distinctive names (Fryer and Levitt 2004); and they allow us to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, with information on whether an applicant receives the job as well as how he is treated during the interview process.

[5] These 300 applicants were prescreened for appropriate age, race, ethnicity, and gender.

[6] Indeed, as an employer herself, the researcher must identify subtle cues about applicants that indicate their ability to perform. Whether or not these cues are explicit, conscious, or measurable, they are present in a researcher's evaluation of tester candidates, just as they are in employers' evaluations of entry-level job applicants. Like employers, researchers are affected by both objective and subjective/subconscious indicators of applicant quality in their selection and matching of testers in ways that should ultimately improve the nuanced calibration of test partners.

[7] In addition to on-site supervision at the start and finish of each day of fieldwork, on several occasions, we "tested the testers." For example, we hid video cameras in the offices of confederate employers, which allowed us to monitor testers' compliance with the audit protocol as well as to use the tapes as a training tool to better synchronize test partners' performance (not counted among results).

[8] Additional models (not shown here) test for fixed effects of individual testers; we find no significant differences across testers within each race group.

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employers, he may appear more withdrawn, nervous, or defensive in interactions. The nature of the interaction may create a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which the tester experiences poor outcomes for reasons unrelated to his race (Steele and Aronsen 1995). We assess these tester effects by analyzing the degree to which personal contact between testers and employers is associated with widening racial disparities. Overall, we find no evidence that testers' interpersonal styles or expectations are associated with increasing discrimination; if anything, personal contact appears to weaken the effect of race, suggesting that testers' performance minimized, rather than exaggerated, our measures of racial bias (see Appendix, Table A1).

The problem of imperfect matching among testers is a well-understood vulnerability of audit experiments, and one to which we devoted considerable attention. Ironically, however, achieving perfect matches can itself produce distortions in the hiring process. Because audit partners are matched on all characteristics that are most directly relevant to hiring decisions (e.g., education, work experience, and physical attributes), employers may be forced to privilege relatively minor characteristics simply out of necessity to break a tie (Heckman 1998:111). If employers care only marginally about race, but are confronted with applicants equal on all other dimensions, this single characteristic may take on greater significance than it would under normal circumstances when evaluating real applicants who differ according to multiple dimensions.

The design of our study, which focuses on the early stages of the hiring process, avoids situations in which employers must choose only a single applicant. By using "callbacks" as one of our key dependent variables, we include cases that represent an employer's first pass at applicant screening.[9] Indeed, recent surveys suggest that employers interview an average of six to eight applicants for each entry-level job opening (Pager 2007b). If race represents only a minor concern for employers, we would expect all members of our audit team to make it through the first cut. If race figures prominently in the first round of review, we can infer that this characteristic has been invoked as more than a mere tie-breaker. In these cases, the evidence of race-based decision making is quite strong.

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

The primary results from the field experiment focus on the proportion of applications submitted by testers that elicited either a callback or a job offer from employers, by race of the applicant. Our first team assesses the effects of race discrimination by comparing the outcomes of equally qualified white, Latino, and black applicants. Figure 1a reports positive response rates for each racial/ethnic group. In applications to 171 employers, the white tester received a callback or job offer 31.0 percent of the time, compared with a positive response rate of 25.2 percent for Latinos and 15.2 percent for blacks. These results show a clear racial hierarchy, with whites in the lead, followed by Latinos, and blacks trailing behind.

Figure 1b shows the contrasts between the three race groups. Once we adjust for employer and tester effects, the confidence interval for the white-Latino ratio of 1.23 includes one.[10] By contrast, the white-black ratio of 2.04 is substantively large and statistically significant. The positive response rate for blacks is also significantly lower than the rate for Latinos. The points in the figure show the cross-validation results obtained by sequentially dropping cases associated with each individual tester. All ratios remain consistently greater than one, indicating that employers treat blacks less positively

[9] Positive responses recorded in this study were fairly evenly split between callbacks and job offers. Employers who made offers on-the-spot were typically hiring more than one applicant, thus similarly avoiding a situation in which a forced-choice becomes necessary. In fact, rates of job offers were more evenly distributed by race relative to callbacks (see Tables A1 and A2).

[10] In a model pooling cases from the two teams, with main effects for team and criminal background, the white-Latino gap becomes statistically significant. The generality of this result certainly deserves more study. The Puerto Ricans of New York that our Latino testers represent are a longstanding community of U.S. citizens. In other local labor markets, where markers of citizenship and accent are more prominent sources of difference, evidence of ethnic discrimination may be stronger.

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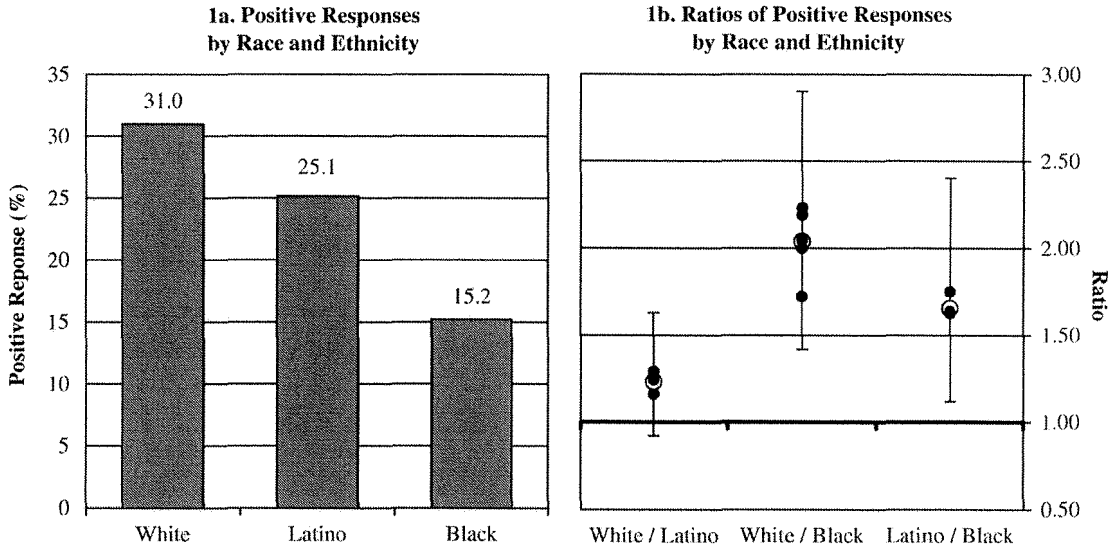

Figure 1. Positive Response Rates and Paired Comparisons by Race and Ethnicity

Notes: Positive responses refer to callbacks or job offers. Hollow circles in Figure 1b indicate point estimates of the ratio. Solid circles indicate ratios obtained by sequentially dropping testers from the analysis. We estimated 95 percent confidence intervals from a hierarchical logistic regression with employer and tester random effects. Number of employers = 171.

regardless of which testers are applying for jobs. Overall, these results indicate that, relative to equally qualified blacks, employers significantly prefer white and Latino job applicants. The findings suggest that a black applicant has to search twice as long as an equally qualified white applicant before receiving a callback or job offer from an employer.

The results from this first comparison indicate employers' strong racial preferences, but the magnitude of this preference remains somewhat abstract. To calibrate the effects of race against another stigmatized category, the ex-offender, we repeated the experiment, this time assigning a criminal record to the white tester. Figure 2a shows the percentage of positive responses—job offers or callbacks—received by each tester. In this experiment, whites with criminal records obtained positive responses in 17.2 percent of 169 job applications, compared with 15.4 percent for Latinos and 13.0 percent for blacks.[11] The white testers' racial advantage narrows substantially in this comparison; yet the white applicant with a criminal record still does just as well, if not better, than his minority counterparts with no criminal background.

Figure 2b shows that the white-Latino ratio is close to one and the confidence interval overlaps one by a large margin. The white-black ratio is now a statistically insignificant 1.32, compared with a significant ratio of 2.04 when the white tester had a clean record. As in the previous experiment, Latinos were preferred to blacks, but here the difference is not significant. As before, the cross-validation treatment effects, obtained by dropping employers associated with one particular tester, are all close to one. These results indicate that, regardless of which testers were sent into the field, employers differentiated little among the three applicant groups.

The comparison of a white felon with black and Latino applicants with clean backgrounds provides a vivid calibration of the effects of race on hiring decisions. While ex-offenders are disadvantaged in the labor market relative to applicants with no criminal background, the stigma of a felony conviction appears to be no greater than that of minority status. Replicating earlier results from Milwaukee (Pager 2003), these findings suggest that New York employ-

[11] The overall rate of positive responses is lower for all testers relative to the results presented in Figure 1. This is likely due to the staggered fielding of teams and resulting differences in the composition of employers audited across the two time periods.

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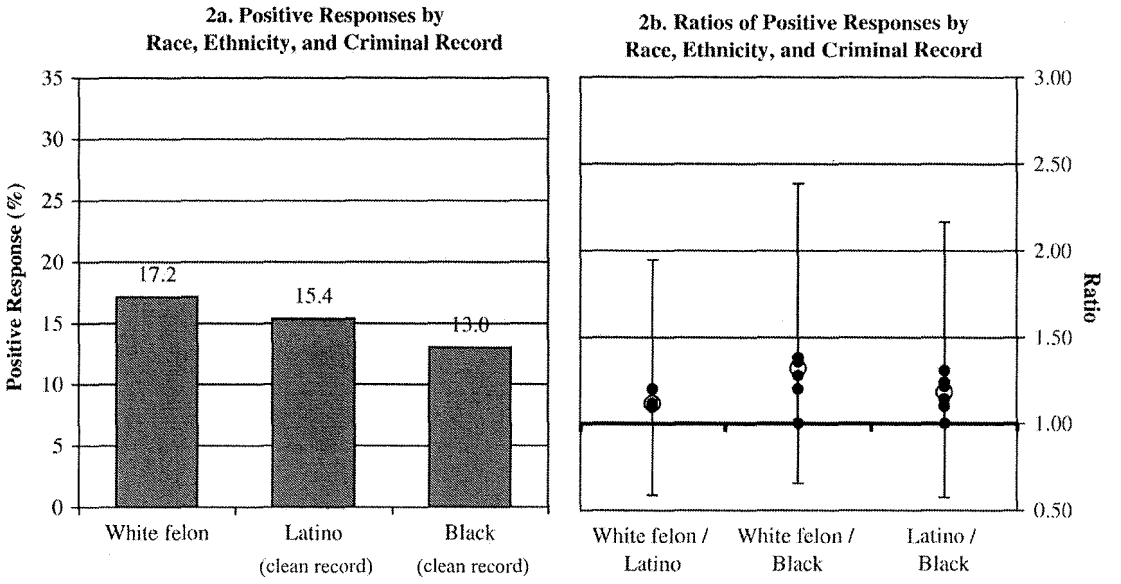

Figure 2. Positive Response Rates and Paired Comparisons by Race, Ethnicity, and Criminal Background

Notes: Positive responses refer to callbacks or job offers. Hollow circles in Figure 2b indicate point estimates of the ratio. Solid circles indicate ratios obtained by sequentially dropping testers from the analysis. We estimated 95 percent confidence intervals from a hierarchical logistic regression with employer and tester random effects. Number of employers = 169.

ers view minority applicants as essentially equivalent to whites just out of prison.

Theories of statistical discrimination point to the very high incarceration rates among young black men as a key explanation for employers' indifference between white felons and blacks with potentially unobserved criminal histories. Current estimates suggest that roughly 18 percent of young black men with high school degrees will experience incarceration by their early 30s (Pettit and Western 2004), and a larger fraction surely have lower level convictions and arrests. Still, the fact that known information about a white applicant's serious criminal conviction is viewed with no more concern than the assumed characteristics of a young black man points to the strength and intensity of contemporary racial attitudes. Overcoming these negative expectations, even for a candidate with otherwise appealing characteristics, requires the negotiation of a number of significant hurdles not present for white job seekers.

Race at Work: An Examination of Interactions between Applicants and Employers

The strong evidence of hiring discrimination from the field experiment provides a clear measure of the continuing significance of race in employer decision making. These numbers, however, tell us little about the process by which race comes to matter. Fortunately, the in-person design of the experiment allows us to further supplement the experimental findings with qualitative evidence from testers' field notes that report their interactions in job interviews. These detailed narratives describe employers' deliberations and suggest some of the ways race comes into play during employment interactions.

Our analysis examines cases in which testers had sufficient interaction with employers for content coding. Consistent with the notion that contemporary forms of discrimination are largely subtle and covert, many cases contain little that would lead us to anticipate the differential treatment that followed. Of those that do, however, we observe several consistent patterns in employers' responses. In particular, three categories of behavior stand out, which we refer to

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here as: categorical exclusion, shifting standards, and race-coded job channeling. The first type of behavior, categorical exclusion, is characterized by an immediate or automatic rejection of the black (or minority) candidate in favor of a white applicant. Occurring early in the application process, these decisions involve little negotiated interaction but appear to reflect a fairly rigid application of employers' racial preferences or beliefs. A second category of behavior, shifting standards, reflects a more dynamic process of decision making. Here we observe cases in which employers' evaluations of applicants appear actively shaped or constructed through a racial lens, with similar qualifications or deficits taking on varying relevance depending on an applicant's race. Finally, a third category of behavior moves beyond the hiring decision to a focus on job placement. Race-based job channeling represents a process by which minority applicants are steered toward particular job types, often those characterized by greater physical demands and reduced customer contact.

By observing the interactions that characterize each of these behavior types, we gain a rare glimpse into the processes by which discrimination takes place. At the same time, we emphasize that this discussion is intended as a descriptive exercise rather than a formal causal analysis. Indeed, the categories we identify are not mutually exclusive; some of the same processes may be operating simultaneously, with employers' shifting evaluations of applicant skills leading to different patterns of job channeling, or assumptions about the appropriate race of the incumbent of a particular position leading to forms of categorical exclusion. Likewise, this typology cannot account for all of the differential treatment we observe—at least half of the employer decisions were made on the basis of little or no personal contact between applicant and employer, leaving the nature of the decision entirely unobserved. With these caveats in mind, we nevertheless view the analysis as providing a unique contribution to the study of racial discrimination, revealing mechanisms at work that observational research can rarely identify.

Categorical Exclusion

Few interactions between our testers and employers revealed signs of racial animus or hostility toward minority applicants. At the same time, a close comparison of test partners' experiences shows a number of cases in which race appears to be the sole or primary criterion for an employer's decision. With little negotiation or deliberation over the selection decision, these employers' decisions seem to reflect a preexisting judgment regarding the adequacy or desirability of a minority candidate. The uncompromising nature of the employer's decision can be characterized as a form of categorical exclusion.

A clear-cut case of categorical exclusion was provided when all three testers applied for a warehouse worker position and received a perfunctory decision. Zuri, one of our black testers, reported: "The original woman who had herded us in told us that when we finished filling out the application we could leave because 'there's no interview today, guys!' . . . When I made it across the street to the bus stop . . . the woman who had collected our completed applications pointed in the direction of Simon, Josue, and myself [the three test partners] motioning for us to return. All three of us went over. . . . She looked at me and told me she 'needed to speak to these two' and that I could go back." Zuri returned to the bus stop, while his white and Latino test partners were both asked to come back at 5 p.m. that day to start work. Simon, the white tester, reported, "She said she told the other people that we needed to sign something—that that's why she called us over—so as not to let them know she was hiring us. She seemed pretty concerned with not letting anyone else know."

In this context, with no interview and virtually no direct contact with the employer, we observe a decision that appears to be based on little other than race. The job is a manual position for which Zuri is at least as able, yet he is readily passed over in favor of his white and Latino counterparts.

This case is unusual in that three testers were rarely present at a given location at the same time. More often, we found evidence of differential treatment only after comparing the testers' reports side by side. Here again, we observed several hiring decisions in which race appeared to be the sole or primary source of differentia-

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tion. In one example, the three testers inquired about a sales position at a retail clothing store. Joe, one of our black testers, reported that, "[the employer] said the position was just filled and that she would be calling people in for an interview if the person doesn't work out." Josue, his Latino test partner, was told something very similar: "She informed me that the position was already filled, but did not know if the hired employee would work out. She told me to leave my résumé with her." By contrast, Simon, their white test partner, who applied last, had a notably different experience: "I asked what the hiring process was—if they're taking applications now, interviewing, etc. She looked at my application. 'You can start immediately?' Yes. 'Can you start tomorrow?' Yes. '10 a.m.' She was very friendly and introduced me to another woman (white, 28) at the cash register who will be training me."

A similar case arose a few weeks later at an electronics store. Joe, the black tester, was allowed to complete an application but was told that his references would have to be checked before he could be interviewed. Meanwhile, Simon and Josue, his white and Latino partners, applied shortly afterward and were interviewed on the spot. Joe's references were never called, while Simon received a callback two days later offering him the job.

When evaluated individually, these interactions do not indicate racial prejudice or discrimination. Side by side, however, we see that minority applicants encounter barriers not present for the white applicant, with employers citing excuses for putting off the black or minority candidate (e.g., "the job has already been filled" or "we'd have to check your references before we can proceed") that appear not to apply for the white applicant. To be sure, certain cases may capture random error—perhaps a position became available between the testers' visits, or an employer was otherwise preoccupied when one applicant arrived but not another, leading to the employer's differential response. Still, the consistency of the pattern in these data suggests that random error is unlikely to be a dominant factor. Indeed, of the 171 tests conducted by the first team (no criminal background), white testers were singled out for callbacks or job offers 15 times, whereas there was only a single case in which a black tester received a positive response when his white or Latino partner did not.[12]

These cases of categorical exclusion, although directly observed in only a small number of audits (5 of the 47 cases of differential treatment across the two teams), reveal one form of discrimination in which racial considerations appear relatively fixed and unyielding.[13] Before black (or minority) candidates have the chance to demonstrate their qualifications, they are weeded out on the basis of a single categorical distinction.

Categorical exclusion represents one important form of discrimination. While these rather abrupt interactions reveal little about the underlying motivation that drives employers' decisions, they do demonstrate the sometimes rigid barriers facing minority job seekers. In these cases, black (or minority) applicants are discouraged or dismissed at the outset of the employment process, leaving little opportunity for a more nuanced review.

Shifting Standards

Making it past the initial point of contact was not the only hurdle facing minority applicants. Indeed, among those who recorded more extensive interaction with employers, we observe a complex set of racial dynamics at work. On the one hand, personal contact with employers was associated with significantly improved outcomes for all testers and a narrowing of the racial gap (see Appendix, Table A1). The testers' interpersonal skills seemed to reduce the influ-

[12] In an additional 13 cases, both white and Latino testers received positive responses; in seven cases, the Latino tester alone was selected (see Appendix, Table A2).

[13] The denominator of 47 represents the total number of cases of black-white differential treatment from the first (N = 28) and second (N = 19) teams. In calculating the numerator, we do not include a number of additional cases of differential treatment resulting from applications in which there was little or no personal contact between testers and the employer (rates of personal contact were similar by race of tester). In such cases, differential treatment may reflect categorical exclusion (based on a visual assessment of the candidate), shifting standards (based on a review of the completed applications), random error, or something else.

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ence of racial bias, or at least did not exacerbate it. Yet, even in the context of this more personalized review, we see evidence of subtle bias in the evaluation of applicant qualifications. In particular, a number of cases reveal how testers' "objective" qualifications appear to be reinterpreted through the lens of race. Although testers' résumés were matched on education and work experience, some employers seemed to weigh qualifications differently depending on the applicant's race. In the following interactions, we see evidence that the same deficiencies of skill or experience appear to be more disqualifying for the minority job seekers (N = 11).

In one case, Joe, a black tester, was not allowed to apply for a sales position due to his lack of direct experience. He reported, "[The employer] handed me back my résumé and told me they didn't have any positions to offer me . . . that I needed a couple years of experience." The employer voiced similar concerns with Josue and Kevin, Joe's Latino and white partners. Josue wrote, "After a few minutes of waiting . . . I met with [the employer] who looked over my résumé. He said that he was a little worried that I would not be able to do the work." Kevin reported an even stronger reaction: "[The employer] looked at my résumé and said, 'There is absolutely nothing here that qualifies you for this position.'" Yet, despite their evident lack of qualifications, Kevin and Josue were offered the sales job and asked to come back the next morning. In interactions with all three testers, the employer clearly expressed his concern over the applicants' lack of relevant work experience. This lack of experience was not grounds for disqualification for the white and Latino candidates, whereas the black applicant was readily dismissed.

When applying for a job as a line cook at a midlevel Manhattan restaurant, the three testers encountered similar concerns about their lack of relevant experience. Josue, the Latino tester, reported, "[The employer] then asked me if I had any prior kitchen or cooking experience. I told him that I did not really have any, but that I worked alongside cooks at [my prior job as a server]. He then asked me if I had any 'knife' experience and I told him no. . . . He told me he would give me a try and wanted to know if I was available this coming Sunday at 2 p.m." Simon, his white test partner, was also invited to come back for a trial period. By contrast, Joe, the black tester, found that "they are only looking for experienced line cooks." Joe wrote, "I started to try and convince him to give me a chance but he cut me off and said I didn't qualify." None of the testers had direct experience with kitchen work, but the white and Latino applicants were viewed as viable prospects while the black applicant was rejected because he lacked experience.

In other cases, employers perceived real skill or experience differences among applicants despite the fact that the testers' résumés were designed to convey identical qualifications. In one example, the testers applied for a job at a moving company. Joe, the black applicant, spoke with the employer about his prior experience as a stockperson at a moving truck company, but "[the employer] told me that he couldn't use me because he is looking for someone with moving experience." Josue, his Latino partner, presented his experience as a stocker at a delivery company and reported a similar reaction, "He then told me that since I have no experience . . . there is nothing he could do for me." Simon, their white test partner, presented identical qualifications, but the employer responded more favorably: "'To be honest, we're looking for someone with specific moving experience. But because you've worked for [a storage company], that has a little to do with moving.' He wanted me to come in tomorrow between 10 and 11." The employer is consistent in his preference for workers with relevant prior experience, but he is willing to apply a more flexible, inclusive standard in evaluating the experience of the white candidate than in the case of the minority applicants. Employers' shifting standards, offering more latitude to marginally skilled white applicants than to similarly qualified minorities, suggest that even the evaluation of "objective" information can be affected by underlying racial considerations.

Even in cases where the white tester presented as a felon, we see some evidence that this applicant was afforded the benefit of the doubt in ways that his minority counterparts were not. In applying at an auto dealership, for example, the three testers met with very different reactions. Joe, the black tester, was informed at the outset that the only available positions were for people with direct auto sales experience. When Josue, his Latino partner, applied, the lack of direct auto sales experience was less of a prob-

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lem. Josue reported, "He asked me if I had any customer service experience and I said not really. . . . He then told me that he wanted to get rid of a few bad apples who were not performing well. He asked me when I could start." Josue was told to wait for a callback on Monday. When the employer interviewed Keith, their white ex-felon test partner, he gave him a stern lecture regarding his criminal background. The employer warned, "I have no problem with your conviction, it doesn't bother me. But if I find out money is missing or you're not clean or not showing up on time I have no problem ending the relationship." Despite the employer's concerns, Keith was offered the job on the spot. The benefit of the doubt conferred by whiteness persists here, even in the context of a white applicant just released from prison.

A pattern in these interactions, when compared side by side, is the use of double standards—seeking higher qualifications from blacks than non-blacks, or viewing whites as more qualified than minorities who present equivalent résumés. Recent research emphasizes employers' use of race as a proxy for difficult-to-observe productivity characteristics (Moss and Tilly 2001; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Where we have detailed field notes on job interviews, the interactions we observe suggest that employers also use race in interpreting and weighing observable skill characteristics. Standards appear to shift as employers evaluate various applicants' qualifications differently depending on their race or ethnicity (see also Biernat and Kobrynowicz 1997; Yarkin, Town, and Wallston 1982).

Race-Coded Job Channeling

The first two categories of differential treatment focus on the decision to hire. Beyond this binary decision, employers also face decisions about where to place a worker within the organizational hierarchy. Here, at the point of job placement, we observe a third category of differential treatment. In our review of the testers' experiences, we noticed that applicants were sometimes encouraged to apply for different jobs than the ones initially advertised or about which they had inquired. In many cases, these instances of channeling suggest a race-coding of job types, whereby employers prefer whites for certain positions and minorities for others. In one case, Zuri, a black tester, applied for a sales position at a lighting store that had a sign in the front window stating "Salesperson Wanted." Zuri described the following interaction: "When she asked what position I was looking for I said I was open, but that since they were looking for a salesperson I would be interested in that. She smiled, put her head in her hand and her elbow on the table and said, 'I need a stock boy. Can you do stock boy?'" Zuri's white and Latino test partners, by contrast, were each able to apply for the advertised sales position.

Another black tester, Joe, was similarly channeled out of a customer service position in his application to a Japanese restaurant. Joe reported, "I told her I was there to apply for the waiter position and she told me that there were no server positions. I told her it was advertised in the paper, and she said there must have been a mistake. She said all she had available was a busboy position. I told her since there was no waiter position, I would apply for the busboy." Later that day, Kevin, his white test partner, was hired for the server position on the spot.

We also observed channeling of the Latino testers. Josue's fieldnotes of an audit at a clothing retailer begin by describing the "young white 20-something women running the place." One of the women interviewed him, asked about past work experience, and asked which job he was applying for. "I told her 'sales associate,'" Josue reported, and he presented a résumé on which the most recent job listed was as a sales assistant at a sporting goods store. "She then told me that there was a stock position and asked if I would be interested in that." Josue was offered the stocker job and asked to start the next day.

In many cases, these instances of channeling are coded as "positive responses" in the initial analyses. While our key concern is about access to employment of any kind, this general focus masks another form of racial bias at work. A closer analysis of the testers' experiences suggests that decisions about job placement, like hiring more generally, often follow a racial logic. We coded all instances of job channeling across both our teams and counted 53 cases (compared with 172 positive responses). By comparing the original job title to the suggested job type, we then categorized these cases as downward channeling, upward channeling, lateral channeling, or unknown. We define downward channeling as (1) a move from a job

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involving contact with customers to a job without (e.g., from server to busboy), (2) a move from a white-collar position to a manual position (e.g., from sales to stocker), or (3) a move in which hierarchy is clear (e.g., from supervisor to line worker). We define upward channeling as a move in the opposite direction. We focus on these two types of channeling for our current analysis. After eliminating cases in which all testers within a team were similarly channeled, we have 23 additional cases of differential treatment that were not recorded by our initial measurement of job offers and callbacks.

Like hiring criteria, job placement is also patterned by race (see Table 1). Black applicants were channeled into lower positions in nine cases, Latinos were channeled down in five cases, and whites experienced downward channeling in only one case. Many of these cases were restaurant jobs in which the tester applied for a position as a server but was steered to a job as a busboy or dishwasher. In almost all cases, the original position required extensive customer contact while the suggested position did not (e.g., salesperson to stocker). Testers were sometimes guided into lower positions because their résumés indicated limited work experience, but racial differences in channeling suggest that insufficient work experience was more penalizing for minorities than for whites. The one case of downward channeling among white applicants involved a tester presenting with a criminal background.

In fact, whites were more often channeled up than down. In at least six cases, white testers were encouraged to apply for jobs that were of a higher-level or required more customer contact than the initial position they inquired about. In one case, the white tester was even encouraged to apply for a supervisory position, despite limited work experience. Kevin reported: "[The employer] then asked me if I had any experience in construction. I told him I did not. He asked if I would be okay working with people that have thick accents like his. I told him that was fine. He then told me that he wanted me to be his new company supervisor."

Employers appear to have strong views about what kind of person is appropriate for what kind of job, based either on their own assumptions of worker competence or assumptions about what their clients expect or prefer in the appearance of those serving them. Consistent with the testers' field notes, employers appear to apply more stringent hiring criteria to minority workers, preferring whites for jobs that require greater skill or responsibility. In addition, minorities are disproportionately channeled out of customer service positions, consistent with other research in which employers view minority applicants as lacking communication skills or as otherwise discomfiting for customers. Although our testers presented highly effective styles of interpersonal communication, the cursory review process for these jobs often leaves group membership more salient than any individuating characteristics.

Table 1. Job Channeling by Race

Original Job Title	Suggested Job
Blacks Channeled Down	
Server	Busser
Counter person	Dishwasher/porter
Server	Busboy
Assistant manager	Entry fast-food position
Server	Busboy/runner
Retail sales	Maintenance
Counter person	Delivery
Sales	Stockboy
Sales	Not specified[a]
Latinos Channeled Down	
Server	Runner
Sales	Stock
Steam cleaning	Exterminator
Counter person	Delivery
Sales	Stock person
Whites Channeled Down	
Server	Busboy
Latinos Channeled Up	
Carwash attendant	Manager
Warehouse worker	Computer/office
Whites Channeled Up	
Line cook	Waitstaff
Mover	Office/telesales
Dishwasher	Waitstaff
Driver	Auto detailing
Kitchen job	"Front of the house" job
Receptionist	Company supervisor

Note: This table includes all cases of upward and downward channeling, except when all testers on a team were channeled similarly.
[a] Employer told tester that "sales might not be right for you."

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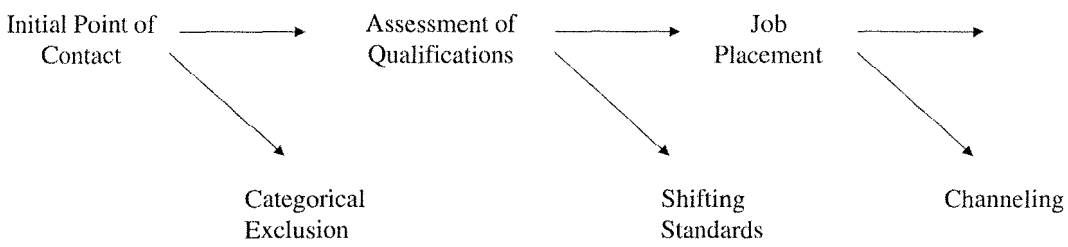

Figure 3. Discrimination at Three Decision Points

The three types of differential treatment we observe illustrate how employers enact their racial preferences in the hiring process. Rather than outward hostility or racial animus, we see more subtle forms of discouragement or rejection. At multiple points in the hiring process, black (or Latino) applicants face additional hurdles or barriers that reduce their chances of employment and affect the quality of jobs for which they are considered. Figure 3 illustrates the processes identified in the preceding discussion. At each of the three decision points, we see pathways deflected by various forms of racial bias. Subtle differences in employers' responses—often imperceptible to the applicants themselves—produce a pattern of outcomes systematically affected by race.

Complementing the quantitative indicators of differential treatment, these qualitative observations provide a rare window into the processes by which discrimination occurs. The three categories of differential treatment observed in these data point to the range of experiences that constitute discrimination in the employment process.[14] In a small number of cases, minority testers were disqualified early on in decisions that appear to reflect employers' fairly rigid preferences. These instances of categorical exclusion represent one of the most extreme forms of discrimination, wherein minority applicants have little opportunity to overcome employers' potential concerns. By contrast, a larger number of interactions suggest a more complicated set of negotiations at play. In evaluating applicant qualifications, minority applicants, and black men in particular, appear to be held to a higher standard than their white counterparts. Black men are disqualified more readily, or hired more reluctantly, than their white partners with identical skills and experience. Furthermore, racialized assessments of applicant quality and "fit" affect not only the decision to hire, but also decisions about job placement, with minority applicants more often channeled into positions involving less skill or customer contact. Together, these experiences illustrate how racial disadvantage is dynamically constructed and reinforced, with the assessment of applicant qualifications and suitability subject to interpretation and bias. While not an exhaustive catalogue of discrimination experiences, the fact that these dynamics are observed in natural settings (with little prompting) attests to their relative frequency and regularity. Our testers' experiences suggest how race shapes employers' evaluations in subtle but systematic ways, with important implications for structuring opportunity along racial lines.

[14] To be sure, our study captures only a few of the many pathways in the employment process that are potentially affected by racial bias. Beyond our window of observation, the pathways of this diagram would presumably continue along later points in the employment process, including wage-setting decisions, training opportunities, promotion, and termination decisions. This research represents one incremental contribution to understanding—and documenting—the varied decision points that may be affected by race.

DISCUSSION

Sending trained testers with equivalent résumés to apply for entry-level jobs reveals clear evidence of discrimination among low-wage employers in New York City. Blacks were only half as likely to receive a callback or job offer relative to equally qualified whites; moreover, black and Latino applicants with clean backgrounds fared no better than a white applicant

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just released from prison. The magnitude of these racial disparities provides vivid evidence of the continuing significance of race in contemporary low-wage labor markets. There is a racial hierarchy among young men favoring whites, then Latinos, and finally blacks as the candidates of last resort.

The episodes of discrimination recorded in this study were seldom characterized by overt racism or hostility. In fact, our testers rarely perceived any signs of clear prejudice. It was only through side-by-side comparisons of our testers' experiences that patterns of subtle but consistent differential treatment were revealed. Minority applicants were disqualified more readily and hired more reluctantly than their white partners with identical skills and experience. Additionally, black and Latino applicants were routinely channeled into positions requiring less customer contact and more manual work than their white counterparts. In interactions between applicants and employers, we see a small number of cases that reflect employers' seemingly rigid racial preferences. More often, differential treatment emerged in the social interaction of the job interview. Employers appeared to see more potential in the stated qualifications of white applicants, and they more commonly viewed white applicants as a better fit for more desirable jobs.

Our findings of discrimination are particularly striking because the testers in this study represent a best-case scenario for low-wage job seekers. The testers were college-educated young men with effective styles of self-presentation. Although posing as high school graduates with more limited skills, these young men stood well above the typical applicant for these low-wage jobs. The effects of race among individuals with fewer hard and soft skill advantages may well be larger than those estimated here.

At the same time, while we find robust evidence of racial discrimination, we should be careful not to interpret these results as showing the level of discrimination actively experienced by minority job seekers in the New York labor market. Our sampling design, based on employers, not workers, over-represents small firms relative to their share of employment. The sample includes many restaurants and independent retailers for whom hiring is less bureaucratic, and who lack the human resource departments that manage the equal employment opportunity obligations of large firms (Dobbin et al. 1993). Nevertheless, our sampled employers well represent the kinds of low-skill service work that dominate low-wage urban labor markets.

A second limitation on the generalizability of our findings results from our sampling procedures based on classified advertisements. Surveys of job seekers suggest that 25 to 30 percent of low skill jobs are filled by classified ads; the remainder are filled through some combination of network referrals, walk-in applications, and employment agencies (Holzer 1987). These search strategies may generate a different distribution of employers from that reported here. Some argue that the focus on jobs advertised through metropolitan newspapers understates the extent of discrimination. Firms that wish to discriminate, it is argued, are more likely to advertise job openings through more restrictive channels, such as networks of existing employees, employment agencies, or more selective publications (Elliott 2000; Fix and Struyk 1993; Petersen, Saporta, and Seidel 2000). Others, by contrast, argue that any random sample of employers will overstate the extent of discrimination actually experienced by job seekers. If minority applicants can identify and avoid firms that discriminate, the actual incidence of labor market discrimination will be correspondingly reduced (Becker 1957; Heckman 1998).

Of course, minority workers' ability to avoid the effects of discrimination by self-selecting into nondiscriminatory firms requires that a sufficient number of nondiscriminatory employers exist; that there are no differences in the quality of jobs offered by employers who are more and less likely to discriminate; and that the search costs necessary to locate nondiscriminatory employers are trivial. Future research using microdata to track the search patterns and outcomes of black and white job seekers could better address these issues. From our data, we can safely conclude that job searches across a wide range of employers represented by the classified ads of five New York newspapers reveal substantial discrimination. Understanding how job seekers adapt to this reality remains a challenge for future research.

Our findings for the New York City labor market add to evidence of racial discrimination in employment reported from recent field

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experiments in Milwaukee, Boston, and Chicago (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Pager 2003). The significant evidence of discrimination found in these studies contrasts sharply with recent survey research showing small racial differences in wages (Farkas and Vicknair 1996; Neal and Johnson 1996). How might these disparate findings be reconciled? First, as noted above, the presence of discrimination in the labor market may lead workers to differentially sort across employers, such that minority job seekers queue for jobs offered by employers who are less likely to discriminate. These dynamics can lead to longer search or wait times for minority job seekers, which might not be reflected in ultimate wage offers. Indeed, data from the late 1990s show that the unemployment spells of black men (3.1 months) are about twice as long as those for whites (1.6 months) (Gottschalck 2003:2). This suggests that the primary effects of discrimination on labor market outcomes may be reflected in employment differentials rather than wages.[15]

Second, the experience of discrimination may add to the psychic costs of the job search process, prompting some to opt out altogether. If discrimination discourages all but the most motivated and able black job seekers, black wage earners would represent an increasingly select group. Since the 1990s, increasing numbers of young black men have dropped out of the formal labor market, contributing to an artificial convergence of black and white wages (Western and Pettit 2005). Without effectively accounting for the processes that precede labor force participation—including the discouraging effects of discrimination—wage estimates can account for only one incomplete picture of the larger employment process.

Our findings add to a large research program demonstrating the continuing contribution of discrimination to racial inequality in the post-civil rights era. Still, significant questions remain unanswered. The audit experiment necessarily focuses on employers' hiring behaviors but does not examine the skills, preferences, and networks of job seekers. We do not know, and few research designs have been devised to test, the relative magnitude of the effects of discrimination compared with the effects of human and social capital. Such an analysis would need to study both employers as they screen job applicants and workers as they search for jobs.

The effects of discrimination, relative to human and social capital, should also be defined broadly. As evidence of discrimination in the post-civil rights era accumulates, new research should go beyond determining whether discrimination is present to consider how the effects of discrimination unfold over the life cycle and across social space. Episodes of discrimination may not only cause unemployment at one point in time, but may have long-term effects that weaken minority workers' attachment to the labor market and reduce labor force participation. Discrimination may produce broad cultural effects in which work itself is de-legitimated as a fair source of opportunity. The effects of discrimination may also vary across the population, concentrating perhaps among the young men whose employment rates are lowest. Tracing these larger and more varied effects of discrimination show both the advantages and limits of the experimental method used here. The experiment allows us to infer discrimination with great certainty, but the effects of discrimination are narrowly defined. The broader effects of discrimination—on the cultural dimensions of economic life and over the life course—are harder to pinpoint but may indicate more fundamental and intractable inequalities. A research agenda that includes these wider consequences would be less skeptical that discrimination exists and more curious about its continuing effects on not just employment inequality, but on American race relations more broadly.

[15] Johnson and Neal (1998), for example, find that after controlling for cognitive ability and other human capital characteristics, black-white differences in employment among young men remain large and statistically significant. The importance of employment over wages for racial inequality in economic status is likely to be especially great for young non-college-educated men, for whom the overall level of wage dispersion is low. Later in the life course, as wage dispersion increases and labor force experience accumulates, the racial wage gap becomes more pronounced (Tomaskovic-Devey, Thomas, and Johnson 2005). For a historical example, see Whatley (1990), who shows that despite the substantial racial barriers to employment that existed among Northern firms after World War I, blacks and whites experienced remarkably similar wage rates.

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Devah Pager *is an Associate Professor of Sociology and Faculty Associate of the Office of Population Research at Princeton University. Her book,* Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration, *investigates the racial and economic consequences of large scale imprisonment for contemporary U.S. labor markets.*

Bruce Western *is Professor of Sociology and director of the Multidisciplinary Program in Inequality and Social Policy at Harvard University.*

Bart Bonikowski *is a PhD candidate in sociology at Princeton University. In addition to his work on stratification, he is completing a project that compares popular conceptions of the nation among the populations of 30 countries.*

APPENDIX

Robustness Checks

We examine the robustness of our primary results by looking at racial and ethnic contrasts for different subsets of the data (Table A1). Although small numbers in certain cells lead to some instability in estimates, these breakdowns can examine the consistency of effects across the full range of the sample. To account for learning or adaptation by the testers, we estimate effects for the first and second halves of the experimental period. In each period, whites and Latinos received significantly more positive responses than did blacks, and whites received slightly more positive responses than did Latinos. To examine whether our results depend strongly on any particular area within New York, we separate the experimental effects by location. Over half the audited employers were located in Manhattan. We found the pattern of black disadvantage throughout Manhattan and in the outer boroughs. To examine whether the first tester sent to an employer was more likely to be successful, we randomized the order in which testers were sent. Experimental effects are similar regardless of which tester interviewed first. Finally, we compare the outcomes of audits in which testers had little or no interaction with the employer with those characterized by more substantial personal contact. Here we see some evidence that personal contact reduces racial disparities in employment, consistent with the notion that individualizing information can help offset the effects of negative stereotypes.

The bottom half of Table A1 presents these same comparisons for the team in which the white applicants presented evidence of a felony conviction. Across these comparisons, we find treatment effects close to zero, supporting the finding that employers did not distinguish strongly between whites with criminal records and minority job seekers without. In short, these results indicate a large racial preference among New York employers for white job applicants over black applicants, smaller preference for whites over Latinos and Latinos over blacks, and little difference between white felons and minorities with clean backgrounds. All results are robust to tester effects and experimental effects and appear to be roughly uniform across New York City.

Results by Tester Teams

In the course of fielding two three-person teams of testers, we used 10 different testers: two Latinos, four blacks, and four whites. In each three-person team consisting of a white, a black, and a Latino, we combined the 10 testers into six different unique combinations. Before pooling the data across combinations of testers, Heckman and Siegelman (1993) recommend testing for the homogeneity of responses across combinations. The columns in Table A2 represent mutually exclusive outcomes; overall response rates by race can be calculated by summing all columns in which a given race group is represented. A chi-square test within each team fails to reject the null hypothesis of homogeneity across combinations. With this evidence of homogeneity, we report treatment effects pooled across testers. Table A2 reports the detailed experimental results for each unique combination of testers.

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Table A1. Percentage of Positive Responses and Race Differences, by Date, Employer Address, and Race of First Tester

Subsample (N)	White (W)	Latino (L)	Black (B)	Race Differences[a] W/L		W/B		L/B	
Total (171)	31.0	25.1	15.2	1.2	(.02)	2.0	(.00)	1.7	(.00)
Date[b]									
Feb. 23 to April 7 (84)	29.8	23.8	9.5	1.3	(.08)	3.1	(.00)	2.5	(.00)
April 8 to July 16 (84)	33.3	27.4	21.4	1.2	(.04)	1.6	(.00)	1.3	(.05)
Location[c]									
Below 34th St. (56)	23.2	21.4	12.5	1.1	(.31)	1.9	(.00)	1.7	(.03)
34th St. to 72nd St. (46)	30.4	21.7	17.4	1.4	(.02)	1.8	(.00)	1.3	(.15)
Above 72nd St. (18)	33.3	22.2	5.6	1.5	(.00)	6.0	(.00)	4.0	(.00)
Other (50)	40.0	34.0	20.0	1.2	(.12)	2.0	(.00)	1.7	(.00)
Race of First Tester									
White (68)	27.9	23.5	10.3	1.2	(.11)	2.7	(.00)	2.3	(.00)
Black (45)	40.0	31.1	20.0	1.3	(.06)	2.0	(.00)	1.6	(.01)
Latino (53)	28.3	22.6	18.9	1.3	(.09)	1.5	(.00)	1.2	(.15)
Type of Positive Response[d]									
Callback (171)	12.9	9.9	2.9	1.3	(.10)	4.4	(.00)	3.4	(.00)
Job offer (171)	21.1	17.0	12.9	1.2	(.02)	1.6	(.00)	1.3	(.02)
Personal Contact[e]									
No personal contact (46)[f]	10.9	6.5	0	1.7	(.09)	>10.9		>6.5	
Personal contact (65)	52.3	46.2	29.2	1.1	(.11)	1.8	(.00)	1.6	(.00)

Subsample (N)	White felon (Wf)	Latino (L)	Black (B)	Race Differences[a] Wf/L		Wf/B		L/B	
Total (169)	17.2	15.4	13.0	1.1	(.25)	1.3	(.08)	1.2	(.17)
Date[b]									
March 2 to April 13 (83)	16.9	13.3	10.8	1.3	(.16)	1.6	(.06)	1.2	(.21)
April 14 to Aug. 6 (82)	17.1	17.1	15.9	1.0	(.43)	1.1	(.35)	1.1	(.34)
Location[c]									
Below 34th St. (51)	9.8	7.8	3.9	1.3	(.30)	2.5	(.05)	2.0	(.00)
34th St. to 72nd St. (46)	13.0	17.4	13.0	.8	(.74)	1.0	(.42)	1.3	(.14)
Above 72nd St. (7)	0	0	0						
Other (62)	29.0	21.0	21.0	1.4	(.08)	1.4	(.09)	1.0	(.46)
Race of First Tester									
White (53)	20.8	18.9	13.2	1.1	(.34)	1.6	(.13)	1.4	(.15)
Black (59)	18.6	15.3	15.3	1.2	(.20)	1.2	(.15)	1.0	(.39)
Latino (52)	11.5	11.5	11.5	1.0	(.44)	1.0	(.42)	1.0	(.41)
Type of Positive Response[d]									
Callback (169)	11.2	9.5	5.3	1.2	(.23)	2.1	(.01)	1.8	(.02)
Job offer (169)	5.9	6.5	7.7	.9	(.58)	.8	(.77)	.8	(.65)
Personal Contact[e]									
No personal contact (75)	8.0	8.0	4.0	1.0	(.45)	2.0	(.09)	2.0	(.04)
Personal contact (39)	35.9	28.2	30.8	1.3	(.12)	1.2	(.24)	.9	(.58)

[a] Numbers in parentheses are bootstrap *p*-values for a one-sided test of whether the ratio is less than or equal to one.

[b] Changes over time capture several possible effects: learning or adaptation by testers, compositional changes in the types of employers brought into the sample at different points, and changes in the business cycle.

[c] Street addresses are for Manhattan.

[d] Because some testers received both a job offer and a subsequent callback, the sum of these two columns may be greater than the total listed above (in which a positive response is calculated by the presence of a callback *or* a job offer).

[e] Analyses of "personal contact" include only those cases in which all tester partners experienced personal contact; the "no personal contact" analyses include cases in which none of the testers experienced personal contact. This exclusion avoids any confounding effect of employers' racial preferences as reflected in the decision to interview.

[f] Because the response rate for blacks in this subsample is zero, ratios in which blacks are in the denominator are undefined. For the purposes of this analysis, we represent this ratio as greater than the value of the numerator over one.

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Table A2. Detailed Experimental Results, by Unique Combination of Testers

	Who Gets a Positive Response (percent)								
Group	All	None	W + L	W + B	L + B	W	L	B	N
White without criminal record (posterior predictive probability of χ^2 statistic: .054)[a]									
1	11	69.2	4.4	3.3	0	7.7	4.4	0	91
2	7.5	67.9	11.3	0	0	9.4	3.8	0	53
3	36.4	18.2	0	0	0	18.2	18.2	9.1	11
4	33.3	33.3	33.3	0	0	0	0	0	6
5	28.6	57.1	14.3	0	0	0	0	0	7
6	0	66.7	0	0	0	33.3	0	0	3
Total	12.9	63.7	7.6	1.8	0	8.8	4.7	.6	171
White with criminal record (posterior predictive probability of χ^2 statistic: .588)									
1	3.7	75.3	2.5	2.5	1.2	7.4	4.9	2.5	81
2	4.9	56.1	2.4	2.4	7.3	14.6	7.3	4.9	41
3	2.8	77.8	8.3	2.8	2.8	2.8	0	2.8	36
4	0	60	0	0	20	0	20	0	5
5	0	75	0	0	0	0	0	25	4
6	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total	3.6	71.0	3.6	2.4	3.6	7.7	4.7	3.6	169

Note: W = white; L = Latino; B = black. Columns of "Who Gets a Positive Response" represent mutually exclusive categories (i.e., rows sum to 100 percent). In the first experiment (no criminal record), there was only a single case (group 3) in which a black tester received a callback when neither of his test partners received one.

[a] The chi-square test is undefined with marginal counts of zero. We calculate a posterior predictive p-value by simulating counts under independence for nonzero cells.

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Bayesian Bigot? Statistical Discrimination, Stereotypes, and Employer Decision Making

By
DEVAH PAGER
and
DIANA KARAFIN

Much of the debate over the underlying causes of discrimination centers on the rationality of employer decision making. Economic models of statistical discrimination emphasize the cognitive utility of group estimates as a means of dealing with the problems of uncertainty. Sociological and social-psychological models, by contrast, question the accuracy of group-level attributions. Although mean differences may exist between groups on productivity-related characteristics, these differences are often inflated in their application, leading to much larger differences in individual evaluations than would be warranted by actual group-level trait distributions. In this study, the authors examine the nature of employer attitudes about black and white workers and the extent to which these views are calibrated against their direct experiences with workers from each group. They use data from fifty-five in-depth interviews with hiring managers to explore employers' group-level attributions and their direct observations to develop a model of attitude formation and employer learning.

Keywords: racial discrimination; employment; employer interviews; African Americans; stereotypes

The continuing significance of race in the minds of employers has been demonstrated in numerous contexts. Interviews with employers reveal the persistence of strong negative associations with minority workers, with particularly negative characteristics attributed to African American men (Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991; Moss and Tilly 2001; Wilson 1996). Studies of hiring behavior likewise suggest that employers strongly prefer white (and Latino) workers to otherwise similar African

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Americans (Pager 2003; Pager, Western, and Bonikowski 2007; Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Bendick, Brown, and Wall 1999; Fix and Struyk 1993). Where the continuing existence of discrimination is a matter of little controversy, however, the underlying causes remain widely contested.

Much of the debate over the causes of discrimination centers on the rationality of employer decision making. Economic models of statistical discrimination, for example, emphasize the cognitive utility of group estimates as a means of dealing with the problems of uncertainty (Phelps 1972; Arrow 1972). Group-level estimates of difficult-to-observe characteristics—such as productivity, reliability, or willingness to submit to authority—can provide useful information in the screening of individual applicants. If employers can accurately estimate differences in the skills or disposition of blacks and whites on average, this information can be helpful in guiding decisions about individual black and white candidates for whom these characteristics are more difficult to observe directly.

Sociological and social-psychological models, by contrast, question the degree to which group-level attributions reflect accurate assessments (Bielby and Baron 1986; Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 1999). Although mean differences may exist between groups on some productivity-related characteristics, these differences may be inflated in their application, leading to much larger differences in individual evaluations than would be warranted by actual group-level trait distributions (Rothschild and Stiglitz 1982).[1] Furthermore, estimates of group characteristics may reflect outdated associations, with factors such as occupational segregation, imperfect information flows, and negative feedback effects reducing awareness of changing distributions (Whatley and Wright 1994; Arrow 1998; Farmer and Terrell 1996). It thus remains unclear whether employers' assessments of various racial groups represent accurate representations and to what extent these assessments are responsive to novel or competing sources of information.

In this study, we take one step toward investigating these questions by measuring the nature of employer attitudes about black and white workers and the extent to which these views are calibrated against their direct experiences with workers from each group. Using data from fifty-five in-depth interviews with hiring managers, we explore employers' group-level attributions and their direct observations to develop a model of attitude formation and employer learning.

Devah Pager is an associate professor of sociology and a faculty associate of the Office of Population Research at Princeton University. Her research focuses on institutions affecting racial stratification, including education, labor markets, and the criminal justice system. Her current research has involved a series of field experiments studying discrimination against minorities and ex-offenders in the low-wage labor market. Recent publications include Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration *(University of Chicago Press 2007) and "Walking the Talk: What Employers Say versus What They Do" (with Lincoln Quillian), in* American Sociological Review *70, no. 3 (2005): 355-80.*

Diana Karafin is a PhD candidate at Ohio State University whose research focuses on consequences of neighborhood integration, racial democracy and crime, and discrimination in the housing and labor markets.

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Prior Research on Discrimination

Direct observations of employer behavior suggest that race continues to shape employment opportunities in important ways. A recent field experiment of employment discrimination in New York City, for example, provided a rare glimpse into the pervasiveness of discrimination in low-wage labor markets (Pager, Western, and Bonikowski 2007). Across hundreds of applications for entry-level jobs, blacks were half as likely to receive a callback or job offer as equally qualified white applicants. Furthermore, blacks with clean records fared no better than a white man just released from prison. The results of this and earlier audit studies provide vivid illustration of the degree to which racial considerations continue to actively shape the employment opportunities available to young black men (Bendick, Brown, and Wall 1999; Fix and Struyk 1993; Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Pager 2003; see Pager [2007] for a review).

Although the foregoing studies provide an important measure of the demand side of the labor market, audit methods offer little insight into the motivations or attitudes that shape employer behavior. Does discrimination typically reflect racial animus? Have employers had negative experiences with African American employees in the past that have led them to shy away from hiring blacks? Or do other factors shape employer decision making?

Previous research leaves these questions only partially answered. The classic study by Kirschenman and Neckerman (1991) indicates that race is indeed salient to employers in their hiring decisions. Results from a large sample of in-depth interviews reveal employers' blatant admission of their avoidance of young inner-city black men, attributing characteristics such as "lazy" and "unreliable" to this group (p. 213; see also Wilson 1996; Moss and Tilly 2001; Waldinger and Lichter 2003).[2]

At the same time, while this study has been widely cited as evidence of employers' deep biases about African Americans, especially young black inner-city men, the findings themselves present a more complicated picture. While some employers spoke only in general terms about the assumed characteristics of black inner-city men, suggestive of the role of broad cultural stereotypes, others made specific reference to negative experiences with their own black employees, indicating that employer attitudes may be heavily shaped by direct observation of racial differences among their workers.

The underlying sources of employer attitudes thus remain somewhat unclear. Indeed, in framing their analysis with the concept of statistical discrimination, Kirschenman and Neckerman (1991) remain agnostic as to whether employers' comments represent accurate depictions or exaggerated stereotypes. Employers are clearly using race as a proxy for employment-relevant characteristics, but the degree to which the use of this proxy is informed by empirical realities remains uncertain.

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Moss and Tilly (2001) also find employers readily referring to negative characteristics among African American workers, with pervasive concerns about dependability, motivation, attitude, and skill. Many of these employers cite concrete experiences with their own black employees as the basis of their attitudes, though some also cite media representations and more general observations of African Americans as the source of their racial attributions (pp. 138-40). At the same time, Moss and Tilly note that a "silent majority" of employers claim not to notice racial differences among their employees. The authors speculate that these responses are due to some combination of social desirability bias, effective screening or training techniques (rendering a population-level racial skills gap irrelevant for the particular firm), or an honest experience of black and white workers as comparable. Among the largest group of employers, then, it is difficult to assess to what extent perceptions of racial differences are relevant for employers' decision making.

While the present study can move no closer to assessing the accuracy (or honesty) of employers' racial assessments, it does attempt to provide a more explicit understanding of the connection between employers' direct experiences and their more general racial attitudes. Following in the footsteps of the important employer-interview studies from the 1990s, this project seeks to better understand the degree to which employers' extensive experience with black and white workers generates assessments of racial differences that reflect their own empirical observations. In exploring the link between experience and beliefs, we hope to provide some insight into the dynamic process by which racial attitudes are constructed and reinforced.

A Rational Actor Model of Hiring

Economic models of statistical discrimination suggest that race offers a useful proxy for difficult-to-observe characteristics. Because productivity is difficult to observe directly, particularly for new hires, employers rely on indirect information inferred from group membership. This model can represent rational action on the part of employers, provided that the information they have about groups is accurate, and provided that there is a mechanism for updating estimates of group characteristics over time. Where discussions of statistical discrimination typically focus on accounting for single-point hiring decisions, the theoretical propositions can be readily extended to a dynamic process. Figure 1 represents such a model schematically, in its simplest form.

The model starts with information about *known group characteristics*: for example, employers may be aware of racial differences in graduation rates, test scores, incarceration rates, and other relevant disparities. Employers may also have direct *prior experiences* to which they refer in shaping their own beliefs. These antecedent sources of information then shape the employers' general *beliefs about blacks*—about their productivity, reliability, intelligence, and other

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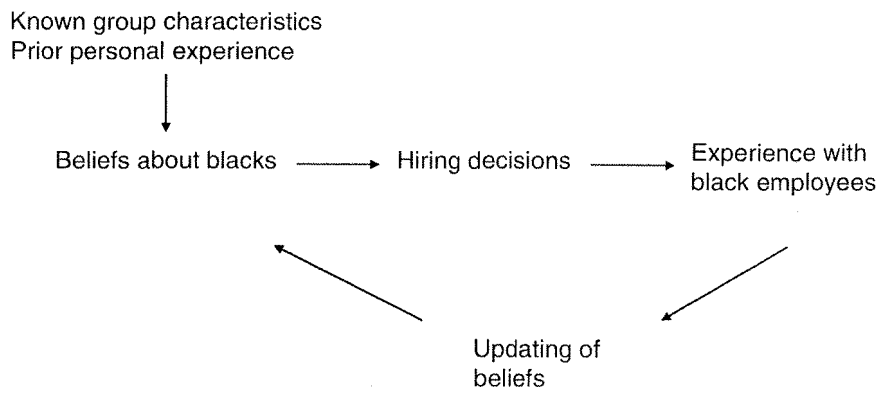
FIGURE 1
A RATIONAL ACTOR MODEL OF HIRING DECISIONS



relevant characteristics. Those beliefs will then guide individual *hiring decisions*. Once hiring decisions are made, employers are exposed to a range of black employees, and to the extent that these *experiences with black employees* do not fit the assumptions of the employer about members of that group, employers will revise their beliefs in a sort of Bayesian *updating process* to reflect a more accurate set of expectations.[3]

This equilibrium model of statistical discrimination describes the mechanisms by which employers can incorporate their direct observations into more general assessments of group characteristics. This feedback loop provides an efficient means of calibrating expectations, observations, and behavior. Consistent with such a model, some research does indeed point to evidence of employer updating. Altonji and Pierret (2001), for example, show that as firms acquire more information about a worker (through posthire observation), their evaluations (as reflected in wage offers) rely less on general (noisy) characteristics, such as educational attainment, and more on individual-specific characteristics, such as cognitive skill (see also Oettinger 1996; Farber and Gibbons 1996).[4] These studies provide compelling evidence that employers weigh their direct observations more heavily than inferences based on group proxies and that employer learning can improve on initial estimates. Nonetheless, this line of research applies specifically to learning about individual workers, whereby group-based estimates are replaced with the observed characteristics of individuals. It remains unclear, however, whether an employer's learning about an individual employee affects the employer's expectations about the broader group to which that individual employee belongs.

Indeed, Farmer and Terrell (1996) provide an elegant theoretical analysis of employer learning and statistical discrimination in which initial employer beliefs are revised through an updating process similar to that described above.

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According to the authors, however, the updating process might apply only to the specific employees under observation, rather than to members of the larger group. "Higher than expected output of one worker provides much information about individual ability, but only a single data point to estimate the average ability of a population of millions. In addition to observation of workers, an employer receives an abundance of information on average group ability from other sources. Observations of average output, or perhaps occupations, of other members of the group influence the assessment of group ability" (p. 206). The process by which employers generate estimates of group characteristics and update those estimates over time thus remains unknown. In the following analysis, we seek to make headway in understanding this dynamic process.

Source of Data

This research is based on in-depth, in-person interviews with 55 New York City employers. The employers in this study represent a subsample of firms advertising for entry-level positions in 2004.[5] In selecting respondents, we aimed to capture the full range of entry-level employers according to industry, occupation, and other types of characteristics thought to be associated with discrimination. In all, we made 243 in-person contacts with 152 firms to solicit participation in our study, 55 of whom agreed, rendering a response rate of 36 percent. The majority of respondents were male (70 percent); white (59 percent); located in Manhattan (82 percent); and managing a firm in the retail industry (46 percent), the restaurant industry (31 percent), or the service industry (11 percent).[6] Furthermore, 47 percent of respondents represented independent firms, 40 percent national chains, and 13 percent local New York City chains.

Interviews ranged in length from thirty minutes to two hours, with the average interview lasting fifty minutes. Content of the interviews reflected a wide range of topics, including recruitment strategies; screening procedures; concerns about entry-level workers; and criteria for selection, placement, and promotion decisions. The questions we focus on here come from a module focusing on employers' racial attitudes. This core segment of the interview probed three primary sets of issues related to (1) employers' general attitudes about the employment problems of black men, (2) their specific experiences with black applicants and employees, and (3) the relationship between employers' concrete experiences and their general attitudes. In the following discussion, we examine the pattern of responses that emerged from our conversations with employers, focusing specifically on the link between employers' general attitudes about blacks and their specific experiences.

The use of qualitative data is well suited to investigating complex processes given its ability to capture the nuance and depth of personal attitudes (Orbuch 1997). But this approach also has its limitations. The relatively small sample prevents us from drawing strong conclusions about the attitudes of employers more

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generally. More important, the validity of findings from interview data depends on respondents' willingness to provide truthful answers to questions. Given the sensitive nature of this investigation, concerns over social desirability bias are highly relevant. As we discuss below, the candid answers we received from employers about their negative racial attitudes offer some reassurance that employers were not entirely self-censoring. At the same time, we must remain aware of the possibility that some responses may be affected by these concerns.

Despite these limitations, in-depth interviews provide a rare window into employers' thought processes and offer some leverage in understanding the complex process of attitude formation among this group. While we cannot conclusively adjudicate among theories based on the results from this study, we hope that our findings will be generative of hypotheses for further testing.

How Do Employers Think about Young Black Men?

In talking about race, and in particular the employment problems of black men, employers' responses represented a range of views.[7] Some employers emphasized the structural barriers facing African Americans, including poverty, a lack of education, disadvantaged neighborhood contexts, and prejudice and discrimination. For example, one employer from a courier company emphasized the problems of residential segregation, discrimination, and incarceration as key barriers to black men's employment opportunities.

> Well, there are of course the obvious problems of racial profiling where people don't want to hire them. They won't tell you that and you don't really think it happens as much in society. People think all of that segregation has ended, but it really hasn't. . . . Another problem, as a good example in terms of hiring people that have criminal backgrounds, a lot of people are not looking to take the chance, and unfortunately the number of African American men that have been incarcerated has just, in the past few years, been phenomenal. And so people don't stop to think that, let's say someone wasn't really involved in something. Maybe they just got caught up, so to speak. Some people may just think that, well you have been in trouble and so I don't want to hire you. So that is another aspect that keeps people from hiring black men.

Another employer from a retail chain pointed to a range of factors, from racism to a lack of education, that disadvantage black men in the labor market:

> Racism is still a huge issue in America. . . . Especially like black men have been repressed for so many years, like due to every, like due to racial issues, a lot of them are very like limited in their, their work experience, or in their education levels, because the education system in New York City is terrible, like in public schools especially, like in the inner city, and you know, in the poorer neighborhoods, so . . . there . . . is a lack of education . . . and so many people can't, you know, afford to go to college. . . . And therefore there's so many jobs that so many people are trying to compete for. . . . You know I think that that's what a lot of the problem is for, for, for especially black men in, in this city.

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Overall, more than 40 percent of employers commented on structural issues, about 15 percent of whom emphasized these factors as their primary explanation for the employment problems of black men.

By far, the most common explanations for black men's employment problems, however, focused on the individual shortcomings of black men themselves. More than three-fourths of employers mentioned individual explanations at some point in their discussion of black men's employment problems, with well over half (60 percent) emphasizing individual factors as their primary explanation. A wide range of perceived shortcomings were identified as primary explanations for black men's employment troubles, including concerns over work ethic, attire, and attitude, which we discuss in detail below.

Of course, we know from other research that Americans tend to give individualistic explanations for inequality in general, whether racial or otherwise (Schuman and Krysan 1999; Kluegel and Smith 1985; Jackman 1994; Bobo 2004). For example, in his analysis of General Social Survey data collected between 2000 and 2004, Hunt (2007) finds that at least half of Americans believed contemporary racial inequality to be caused by a "lack of motivation," relative to less than a third who cited discrimination as an important problem.[8] To some extent, then, the distribution of responses we observe reflects a more general reluctance to view inequality in structural terms.

At the same time, however, the content in these interviews goes beyond the standard narrative of "pull yourself up by your bootstraps." Certainly we also heard comments of this sort. One employer from a local restaurant chain, for example, insisted, "If you are persistent, something will eventually pan out for you. I am sure of it. If you really want a job, you will eventually find one." The comments we focus on in this analysis, by contrast, go well beyond these generic beliefs in individualism to reveal far more specific attributions about black men.

In asking employers to reflect on their experiences with workers from different racial groups, we are not simply asking them about their general beliefs about inequality; we are asking them to draw from their expertise as *employers* to help us better understand why the economic outcomes for some groups are systematically better/worse than others. Given their unique vantage point, we might expect employers to express attitudes about the characteristics of black and white workers that diverge from mainstream American racial attitudes. Because of highly segregated social networks, many white Americans' exposure to African Americans is limited to casual observation, brief encounters, and media representations. Most employers, by contrast, have had extensive contact with black workers and have had the opportunity to observe these workers perform specific tasks and responsibilities.

Under these conditions, then, we might expect employers' direct experiences to play a larger role in shaping their racial attitudes relative to other white Americans. Previous research provides only partial insight into this question. Bobo, Johnson, and Suh (2002), for example, find that employers' racial stereotypes are indistinguishable from those of the general public, suggesting that workplace power or experience does little to shift generalized racial associations.[9]

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At the same time, close-ended survey measures capture only one dimension of attitudes, potentially overlooking some of the complexities and contradictions embedded in employers' ideas about the characteristics of racial groups. The present study uses in-depth interviews to investigate employers' attitudes about and experiences with black men. We begin with an investigation of employers' general characterizations of black men, and then explore the degree to which these characterizations are rooted in direct experiences and observations.

Lack of a work ethic

One of the most common themes we heard from employers centered on the perceived lack of a work ethic among black men (fully 55 percent mentioned this issue). Some of these employers referred to a general lack of motivation to work among African American men. Others described a desire among black men to take advantage of the system instead of working. One employer at a retail store said simply, "I will tell you the truth. African Americans don't want to work." A manager of a retail store said similarly, "They don't want to work—you can tell by the attitude, clothing, the general body language." The owner of a dry-cleaning store commented, "They just don't have any drive. No get up and go attitude." Likewise, a young male employer working in a national clothing chain stated, "I think for a lot of them they are too lazy to work so they are not going to work."

A human resources manager at a national retail chain, when asked what she thinks explains the employment problems of black men, explained,

> Employer (E): They are not as motivated as other races to, you know, to get out and do more and to improve or make themselves better. ... [T]hey are not as motivated or determined to move up or to even do anything to improve themselves.
> Interviewer (I): What do you think this lack of motivation stems from?
> E: I don't know how to say this but probably laziness. Just being lazy and not wanting to work.

When asked the same question, the manager of a local restaurant chain in New York City first argued that more black men are employed than the statistics indicate because many work off the books. However, the employer then refined his initial explanation, stating, "Listen, I also think there is a degree of being lazy." As with many of the other employers interviewed, this manager seemed to believe that if black men were motivated to search for employment in a responsible manner, their employment problems would be resolved.

In several cases, employers attributed the lack of work ethic to a complex history of racism and paternalism. For example, the long-term manager of an industrial supply store in the Bronx noted, "In America blacks believe the golden opportunity is to be taken care of." Another employer who earlier had asserted that "African Americans don't want to work" elaborated on his initial comment:

> Maybe they think that this country owes them so much. Because of slavery and all of that. They, they tend to forget that was a couple of years ago. Instead of catching up with

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> the world, they still keep that anger. . . . So African American men feel like they deserve something. That is basically why they don't want to work. They feel that if they can get things for free, why not?

The manager of a national restaurant chain expressed a similar view, differentiating between black men and black women. "I think the mentality is changing. I think [black men] are more accepting of letting the female work and they stay home." He went on to explain,

> I think, you know, a percentage of it, probably has to do with them figuring out how to take advantage of the system. You know, with welfare or something like that. I do think that a lot of them have the mentality of: I'm black and the government doesn't help. So, let me do what I can to get from the government. Though Martin Luther King has changed the world, a lot of them have the mentality that it is still a white world.

A different employer emphasized that programs exist to help those in need of work but that black men elect to ignore the programs as they want "things handed to them." The main supervisor of a national food chain explained,

> The key is, I think there are great programs out there, but people don't take advantage of them. It is probably laziness. You know, there are programs. But people are lazy. A lot of people want things handed to them.

Another employer focused more specifically on negative consequences of welfare dependence:

> Unfortunately we've bred generations of welfare—of people whose . . . careers are . . . welfare and social agencies. And, uh, and it's unfortunate. A lot of these people just don't have any work values.

Applying a similar line of reasoning, the young manager of a local telemarketing firm expressed frustration with black men playing the "race card" as a way of escaping responsibility:

> I mean, I do understand that sometimes the black man is racially profiled. So it is something they are always going to deal with. This is unfortunate for them, but I think they shouldn't even go there with playing the race card. I mean, a lot of them are like, "You treat me this way because I am black," and "I can't do this and I can't do that." I just think for a lot of them, it is that they just don't want to do things. They want to smoke weed and be a rapper.

Although this employer does see racial discrimination as a reality, he views it as more often used as a convenient excuse for failure than a direct cause. Underlying the employment problems of black men, according to this employer, is more often a simple lack of motivation and effort.

According to each of these employers, a lack of work ethic, motivation, and personal responsibility is pervasive among African American men, and together,

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these factors represent the primary causes of this group's employment problems. Historical social policies (e.g., slavery and welfare) are seen less as explanations for these patterns and more as convenient excuses available for African Americans in the abdication of responsibility.

Self-presentation

A second persistent theme in the interviews was the issue of black men's self-presentation (45 percent of employers mentioned this issue). In particular, employers highlighted problems of unsuitable appearance, negative attitude, and inappropriate conduct among black men. Particularly for positions involving customer service, employers expressed concern about the image projected by black men in their attire and attitude. An employer representing a local New York City clothing chain remarked,

> Sometimes these people looking for a job, why would they have a do-rag on and jeans? Why would they? You know, just the way you present yourself, it's how you are. . . . The black male, yes. It's just the way they carry themselves.

Another employer, the manager of a children's clothing store, when explaining why black men have difficulty securing employment, stated,

> The way they present themselves in the store. If they come in, and excuse the word, but they are all thugged out, it is not somebody I want on my sales floor.

Also placing significant weight on the role of appearance in securing employment, an employer representing a popular local New York City retail chain commented,

> If you go out looking for a job with caps, baggy pants and triple x t-shirts or whatever, you can't expect someone to hire you like that. Why don't you put on some decent clothes and go look for a job? That is the mistake minorities, black and Hispanics tend to do. They look for a job, and when they don't get hired, they automatically say it is discrimination.

The manager of a retail clothing chain complained, "[Black men are] usually, like very urban looking, baggy pants, you know, just like baggy clothes, hat." Likewise, an employer for a moving company said, "I think people who come in wearing baggy pants or something like that just make a bad impression. You can be green, orange, purple, or whatever. It doesn't matter, it isn't good."[10] For these employers, the problems of attire—and specifically the issue of baggy pants—signaled a lack of professionalism or an ignorance about appropriate work attire, something they often associated with black men.

In addition to matters of appearance, employers' comments about the self-presentation of black men also emphasized issues of attitude and conduct. Black men were often perceived as having a "bad attitude" about work or relations of

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authority, or at times behaved in ways considered inappropriate for mainstream work environments. When considering the employment problems of black men, an employer from a national clothing chain explained, "It's just the way they carry themselves." Another described black men's tendency to present "language and the attitude, like gangsta or street."

The manager of a large national retail chain noted that differences in the self-presentation and conduct of black and white men affected the way they are perceived by employers and customers:

> I have heard people say that it is easier to deal with a white person more than a black person. I guess because they feel black people are always loud and hyper. Which is true. White people may know how to carry themselves a little better than black people. Black people always want to make a scene and always want to be heard.

A manager of a national retail store emphasized the distinction between qualifications and self-presentation, with the latter undermining the former in the case of black men:

> You know, I know a lot of black males and I know how they react to things and I know why they don't get jobs. I kind of know why. Some of them are actually qualified for jobs but they go in with that attitude. It is all in how they present themselves.

Several employers commented on the attitude problems they perceived among young black men as reflecting a sense of hostility or resistance to authority. An employer from a small, independent retail store stated, "[Black men have] this kind of attitude that is, is umm, resentful. It is hard. It is not an attitude that is favorable for business." An employer representing a large national clothing chain emphasized that black men don't present themselves to employers appropriately because they have a chip on their shoulder:

> I: Why do you think they are not presenting themselves in what you think is the best way? Where does this stem from?
> E: Um, ego and insecurity. The insecurity part is that they don't feel that they are right for the job. They lack that confidence but yet their ego won't let them admit it so they have a chip on their shoulder.

The owner of a local garment factory echoed some of the same concerns:

> [Black men] act a little more belligerent than others. There is the attitude and pattern of animosity with this group. They have a chip on their shoulders. They think, man, you are white and that is why you don't give me a job. That kind of thing. . . . The black male will come and say I am better than this and better than that and so on. So there is more of a macho type of attitude with the black male. When you go for a job you have to be, besides appearing decent and trustworthy, you can't look macho or act like you are better than other people.

Another employer at a retail store found it difficult to advise young black men about appropriate attire because of their resistance to authority.

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> I think that it is hard for these men because they are too proud. Especially the younger guys, the eighteen- and nineteen-year-old black guys that come in here, are like, "Who are you to tell me no?" They have a real problem with authority.

These employers perceive black men to exhibit styles of dress or demeanor that present barriers to their mainstream involvement in the labor market. Concerns about the self-presentation of black men, ranging from baggy pants to bad attitudes, were viewed as a key obstacle to employment for this group.

A threatening or criminal demeanor

A final major theme in employers' general comments about black men focused on a perceived threatening or criminal demeanor. Extending comments about the "hardness" or "animosity" of black men discussed above, roughly a third of employers mentioned concerns of this sort. According to an employer from a local garment factory,

> I find that the great majority of this minority group that you are talking about either doesn't qualify for certain jobs because they look a little bit more, they come on as if, well, they are threatening.

An employer from a popular national clothing chain dismisses the racial frame initially but ultimately reached a similar conclusion:

> I don't know if I consider it on a race level. I just consider it more on approachability. And if someone seems intimidating, you know, and which, stereotypically might be, you might consider like a Hispanic person or a black person more intimidating than like a white person.[11]

Other employers focused more specifically on concerns about criminality. According to one employer from an ice cream chain, for example,

> I notice here working in the store, sometimes, a group of young black males will come in. And sort of, a red flag goes up. Everything stops, and you wonder, what are they going to do? Are they here to buy something? There is a general belief that, because of the way they dress and how they carry themselves, that they are trouble.

An employer from a retail store explained, "I mean, black males are not expected to go out and work, because they are doing other illegal things in the neighborhood." Likewise, an employer for a moving company pointed to the lure of criminal activity among African Americans:

> They see the drug dealer who is driving around in a Lexus, and then they see me in a Chevy, and they say I don't need to be a mover. I don't need to work sixty hours a week. I can go hustle stuff on the corner and drive a Lexus.

Another explained simply, "Half of them are in jail." These employers associate black men with danger, crime, and the criminal justice system, factors that appear incompatible with legitimate work.

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Overall, then, we find fairly pervasive negative attitudes about black men as a group. While some employers did place more emphasis on lack of opportunity, prejudice, or other more structural factors, the majority of employers pointed to specific deficiencies among black men that led them to have difficulty in the job market. Our next set of questions seeks to investigate to what extent these negative attitudes are a function of employers' direct experiences.

Are Employers' Perceptions Informed by Experience?

In discussing their general attitudes about black men, many employers inevitably referred to specific observations or experiences in their own workplace. These anecdotes point to one potential source of employers' general attitudes, though they tell us little about the overall distribution of experiences. Our next set of interview questions, then, attempted to elicit more systematic information about employers' experiences with applicants and employees from various racial groups.[12] In particular, we asked employers to consider the extent to which the characteristics they had described to us were reflected in the black applicants or employees they had encountered over the past year.

In some cases, there was clearly a link between employers' general attitudes and their direct experiences. For example, one employer who had expressed negative views of blacks generally ("basically these people are lazy") went on to describe the differences he has observed between black and white applicants.

> Black people, mostly, yeah I can say that they come in, and "Are you hiring?" That's their question, and then that's it. They don't have, they are not prepared at all. I give them an application and they don't show up back with it. It's like, "I'm taking it, but let's see what happens. . . ." White people . . . they mostly come with resume already done, the paper with them.

Another employer who had commented earlier on dysfunctional culture affecting "people that come from two or three generations that are on welfare" described the differences he observed:

> Well for my business I am looking for somebody that comes dressed for the interview. If you walk in with baggy jeans it is not even worth talking to you. This is something I have observed with black men. I mean, yeah, I definitely have noticed that a lot of black male applicants typically don't know how to properly talk to me, or they leave messages on the phone that aren't really what I am looking for. I mean, they just don't seem energetic or like they really want this job.

An employer from a national service organization commented on her experiences with black applicants who seemed to take job opportunities for granted, not demonstrating suitable interest or seriousness of purpose.

> People will call here and you will try to schedule them for an interview. So you will offer them an interview, and they call up asking for one, and they say things like, "Yeah, I don't know if that time works for me." You know what I mean? It is just not proper etiquette.

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While we were conducting an interview with the manager of a local telemarketing firm, a black male job applicant entered the room, dressed in baggy clothing, and asked to schedule an interview. The manager replied that the individual would have to come back later in the week, to which the applicant stated, "Gotcha. See you then." After the applicant left, the manager stated, "Not gonna hire him. See what I mean? Where did he learn that 'gotcha' was the right thing to say to a potential boss? And see what I mean about attire?"

A number of the employers we spoke to reported at least some negative experiences with black applicants and/or employees, ranging from comments about individual workers to descriptions of more general patterns. Overall, among our sample of white respondents, employers were more likely to note racial difference among their applicant pool (46 percent) than among their employees (34 percent).[13] This suggests that employers are doing an effective job at weeding out good employees from a more heterogeneous applicant pool. At the same time, note that more than half of employers claim not to notice racial differences in the quality of their applicants, and fully two-thirds of employers notice no racial differences among their own employees. In these cases, there is often little relationship between the impressions they report about African Americans generally and their own direct observations of black employees.

For example, one employer earlier emphasized the lack of work ethic among blacks ("just being lazy and not wanting to work") as the major factor for their employment problems; but when asked if she had observed these problems in her workplace, she replied, "Well no. . . . Of course once in a while they goof off, but that is across the board. I don't see any differences between groups." A video store employer acknowledged that stereotypes were often quite different from reality: "There are people that say there are differences in work ethics of black men, but I have no specific thing like that that I have noticed. Absolutely not. The worst employees have been the non people of color. They have been the worst."

An employer who earlier had alluded to the problems black men have with "presentation" and "attitude," went on to describe his employees with the following comments:

I: Among your employees, have you noticed differences in the work performance of blacks and whites?
E: Um, do you mean in terms of work ethic?
I: Sure.
E: They really have a nice work ethic.
I: What about comparing whites to blacks?
E: In my experience blacks will outdo them.
I: Blacks will outdo whites?
E: Yeah, once you get the right person. Sometimes with an entry-level, they don't seem as committed.
I: You mean your white employees?
E: Yeah. It is like they think they are above this. I don't find this with the black employees.

An employer for a retail clothing store (who had referred to blacks as being more "intimidating" than whites) came to a similar assessment about her own employees: "It's hard to compare because it's different types of work that they're doing,

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but I would say that the people who are not of Caucasian descent work a little harder than the white kids."

In several cases, employers did acknowledge differences among workers but accounted for them along nonracial lines. We asked an employer who had earlier emphasized the importance of attire for her workers:

I: Do you observe that black male applicants are more likely than white male applicants to present themselves to you inappropriately?
E: No not really. I think it is a problem for all of them. I think just men in general.

In another case, the employer started out describing the problematic applicants she deals with. When we pressed her to consider whether these characteristics were more prevalent among black men, she thought about the question and then reframed her comments in terms of age.

E: They don't come in dressed, they don't come in and speak to you in a correct way. They speak like they are hanging out and not looking for a job.
I: Okay, so do you notice that black males come in not prepared or dressed appropriately more often than white males that are looking for jobs?
E: I think it is about the same honestly. It is more about the age. The high school kids are the ones that don't come in dressed like they are looking for a job. As they get older you can see the difference because they are coming in in slacks and they are coming in in a shirt and they are speaking to you. They aren't just like, "Here is an application," and then they walk out the door.

These employers appear to have identified a cluster of behaviors or styles of presentation that signal poor performance, some of which are often associated with African American men, but when pressed to make sense of their observations, they focus on a different set of categories. Of course, it may be the case that employers feel uncomfortable making racial attributions and thus retreat to a language of gender or age out of social desirability concerns. We have no way of conclusively ruling out this possibility. At the same time, given the extremely candid racial remarks made by these employers just moments before, we feel some reassurance in taking these responses at face value. These comments lead us to believe that employers felt sufficiently at ease to speak in racial terms, and thus, we see little reason that they would suddenly retreat into a more politically correct style of discourse. In fact, we were concerned with the opposite effect, that employers would feel some pressure to come up with specific examples of poor performance among their black employees, if only to maintain consistency with their earlier comments. Quite the contrary, we found employers repeatedly emphasizing the lack of clear distinctions between black and white applicants and employees, even as these comments appear to contradict earlier statements about the generalized characteristics of black men.

As a final example of the disconnect that often appeared between employers' expectations and outcomes, one employer from a small retail store describes her recent experience with a black man she had hired for a stockperson position in her retail store:

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> Like, last year. I had this guy come in, with a big hat and a big jacket. I don't know if he had a criminal record, but he looked like it. But I was so desperate that I hired him. [Laughs] He was OK. But the way he dressed. Sometimes the way they dress. It is bad. I mean, a big hat. You try to be nice, but at the same time, I don't need a guy with a big hat. [Laughs] I was surprised that he worked out well. He finished the season very nicely."

In this case, despite the fact that the employer viewed this man as poorly dressed and potentially criminal, he ultimately wound up being a reliable employee. Indeed, employers frequently acknowledged that their first impressions of applicants were often completely off base. Here, the employer recognized her misjudgment, and yet, there is little sign that this experience caused her to rethink her more general, negative impressions of black men. Earlier in the interview, this employer had characterized black men as having attitude problems. "Socially there is a difference. In the neighborhood [black men] have a kind of attitude, that is, is um, resentful. It is hard. It is not an attitude that is favorable for business." Although here (and in other comments), she insists that her own experiences with black employees have been overwhelmingly positive, she retains strong negative impressions about black men "in the neighborhood," the source of which remains unknown.

[E]mployers frequently acknowledged that their first impressions of applicants were often completely off base.

How to Explain the Gap between Employers' Perceptions and Experience?

Whereas most of the employers in our sample expressed consistent negative attitudes about black men, far fewer could identify specific patterns or experiences among their own applicants or employees to fit these characterizations. How can we account for this surprising disconnect? While the results of this study cannot provide a definitive answer, we consider several plausible explanations.

The salience of negative events

First, it is possible that while employers' experiences with black applicants or employees *on average* may be similar to those with whites, a small number of negative experiences may hold especially strong weight in shaping attitudes

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(Fiske 1998). Indeed, several of the employers in our sample referred to singular experiences that, while not representative of their experiences more generally, seemed to shape their associations of specific groups. According to one employer from a national retail chain,

> You know, everyone has a couple of bad hires. And you remember those very vividly. And who that person is can really impact. [He describes a negative experience with an African American female employee.] That person just stuck in my head. That was the first time I had done hiring during a holiday season, which is pretty stressful. And that person just stuck in my head. And I could see her. It was hard to not see her in other people that you meet.

According to this employer's account, one particularly negative experience with a black employee colored the employers' expectations of blacks in the future. Where this employer also noted a number of positive experiences he had had with African American employees, this negative experience appeared to carry especially strong weight.

In another case, an employer for a retail clothing store spoke about his negative experiences with a few black employees at a previous company.

> One of them in particular was threatening me and telling me after I fired him that he was going to wait for me outside and that he was going to get me. So that kind of thing sometimes gives you a vengeance. So, you know, you become biased a little bit.

Again, this employer acknowledges the ways in which a particularly unpleasant encounter contributed to his biases against black men more generally. It may be the case, then, that where employers may have had only a small number of unusually negative experiences with African Americans, these incidents may be the driving force behind generalized negative attributions. Benign or positive experiences create less salient memories, even if more prevalent overall.

At the same time, only a few of the employers in the sample reported extreme negative experiences, and more than half reported that their experiences with black and white applicants and employees were roughly comparable.[14] Without salient negative experiences coloring attitudes, what then might explain employers' persistent negative racial attitudes?

Selection and screening

A second possible explanation for the disconnect between employers' characterizations of black men in general and their direct experiences has to do with the various selection and screening procedures that weed out the most undesirable members of the group. Indeed, recall that employers were significantly more likely to report noticing racial differences in the characteristics of their job applicants than among their employees (46 versus 34 percent), suggesting that the hiring process leads to a more even distribution of productivity characteristics among black and white employees than exist in the general population. As one

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employer mentioned, "Yeah, once you get the right person . . . ," indicating that the selection process can yield high-quality black employees, even if there is a great deal of variation within the general population. Recognizing that employees are not picked at random, we asked employers to comment separately on their perceptions of the applicant pool, expecting that racial differences may be more pronounced before the employers' active screening. The fact that more than half of employers claim not to notice racial differences even at this stage suggests that more remains to be explained than employer sorting.

Of course, the hiring process is not the only selection process at work. Showing up to apply for a job itself involves a process of selection, with the search process requiring some degree of organization, motivation, and a commitment to formal work. Particularly in recent years, as we have seen increasing numbers of young black men exit the labor force altogether (Holzer, Offner, and Sorensen 2005), selection into labor force participation may differentiate the types of black men employers encounter among their applicant pool from those in the general population.

This research does not make claims about employers' accuracy in detecting population-level characteristics relative to those observed in the workplace. Rather, we simply note that for many employers, whatever sources of information they use to infer general characteristics of black men, direct experiences with black applicants and employees do not appear dominant.

[F]or many employers, whatever sources of information they use to infer general characteristics of black men, direct experiences with black applicants and employees do not appear dominant.

Updating versus subtyping

A third potential explanation for the disconnect between employers' general attitudes and their specific experiences draws upon the social-psychological concept of subtyping. Where Bayesian models of updating assume that individuals incorporate new information by refining their expectations in ways consistent with their experiences, social psychological models emphasize the cognitive resistance to information that is disconfirming of expectations (Fiske 1998). A wealth of experimental evidence illustrates ways in which individuals are prone to view

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those who do not conform to stereotypes as exceptions, unrepresentative of the group as a whole, rather than as impetus for stereotype refinement (Taylor 1981; Weber and Crocker 1983). The creation of a subtype allows group stereotypes to remain intact in the face of disconfirming information.

Figure 2 applies the theory of subtyping to the schematic model proposed earlier to reveal a potentially different set of processes shaping racial attitudes. Here, instead of (or in addition to) known group characteristics and prior experiences being the predominant sources of racial attitudes, cultural stereotypes and media imagery play a strong role in shaping group expectations.[15] Those beliefs then translate into hiring decisions, which in turn provide a range of direct experiences for employers with black workers. But instead of positive experiences with black employees—as many of these employers report—leading to an updating of beliefs about blacks in general, we see a process of subtyping. As the saying might go, "*My blacks* aren't like blacks in general." Employers view their own black workers as a special subtype whose characteristics have little bearing on their evaluations of the larger group. Correspondingly, we see no pathway linking direct experiences with general beliefs.

Of course, this simple model does not capture the many nuances of attitude formation and change, which certainly contain a more diverse set of influences and pathways than are represented here. Rather, this basic schematic serves to represent one important alternative to the model proposed earlier, in which information flowed from the general to the specific and back again in ways that enhanced accuracy over time. Here, by contrast, an updating of expectations may occur with respect to specific members of the group (the subtype), but little revision of employers' more general attitudes is expected.

The analysis likewise does not imply that employers are necessarily wrong in their assessments of various group characteristics. It may be the case that employers' information about African Americans as a group is accurate and that the various selection processes at work (with individuals selecting into labor market participation and employers selecting workers) simply yield a more advantaged subgroup to which employers are exposed. This research makes no claims about the relationship between employers' attitudes and the "true" characteristics of African Americans. Rather, the findings suggest that, whatever sources of information they may be drawing from in forming racial attitudes, employers do not seem to draw heavily from their own personal experiences.

Conclusion and Discussion

The findings of this research suggest that, while most employers expressed strong negative views about the characteristics of African American men, fewer than half of these employers reported observations of their own applicants or employees consistent with these general perceptions. Where employers may

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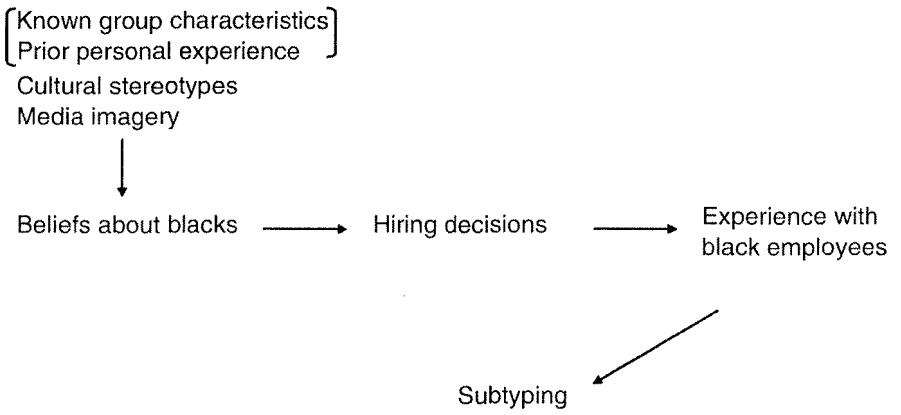
FIGURE 2
RESILIENCE OF STEREOTYPES



update their expectations regarding individual workers, these experiences do not seem to have noticeable effects on their attitudes about the group as a whole. Rather, employer attitudes appear more consistent with a model of subtyping, in which individuals who do not conform to a stereotype are viewed as exceptions whose characteristics have little bearing on the larger group.

Employers surely receive relevant information about various groups from sources other than direct workplace experience. They observe and interact with people in public spaces, they read newspaper coverage and watch TV news, and they are aware of racial inequality and have their own ideas about how and why this inequality is generated and maintained. These sources of information surely provide valuable complements to direct workplace experience. At the same time, it is surprising that the experiences employers report from their own direct observations do not carry greater weight in their general attitude formation. These results suggest that simple contact and exposure are themselves insufficient to revise deeply embedded racial attributions.

This analysis holds potentially troubling implications for hiring behavior. We know from the results of field experiments that employers consistently avoid black workers, hiring them at roughly half the rate of equally qualified whites. Where models of statistical discrimination might interpret this behavior as the rational response to observed differences in the productivity of black and white workers, the present research questions this conclusion. The majority of employers who report positive experiences with black workers (or no differences between black and white workers) nevertheless maintain strong negative attitudes about black men generally. To the extent that these attitudes shape hiring decisions, even in the scenario of equal productivity among black and white workers, we would expect the problems of hiring discrimination to persist well into the future.

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Notes

1. See Armour (1997) for an extensive discussion of the logical, legal, and moral dilemmas of "reasonable racism."

2. Although the results of this study are indeed striking, it is important to keep in mind that more than 50 percent of Kirshenman and Neckerman's (1991) sample "either saw no difference [in the work ethic of whites, blacks, and Hispanics] or refused to categorize in a straightforward way" (p. 210).

3. A similar process of updating is described in the social psychological literature on stereotype change, referred to as a "book keeping model," according to which new information is incrementally incorporated into existing beliefs or attitudes about a group (Weber and Crocker 1983).

4. In this analysis, cognitive ability is observed to the researcher (by the respondent's score on an Armed Forces Qualification Test [AFQT] test measured earlier) but not by the employer at the point of hire. The assumption is that the worker's cognitive ability becomes observable to the employer with time on the job.

5. Roughly 80 percent of the employers in this sample were drawn from a random sample of employers advertising for an entry-level position in 2004 (see Pager, Western, and Bonikowski 2007). The remaining 20 percent were drawn through a purposive sampling technique enabling us to better represent large employers and industries underrepresented by the primary sample.

6. Note that within these industries are represented a wide range of job titles, including stockers, sales assistants, busboys, kitchen staff, waiters, couriers, and customer service positions.

7. The vast majority of employers offered multiple explanations within a single response series. In categorizing employers' sentiments, we distinguish between individual and structural explanations using several coding schemes. The first coding scheme takes into account the "first-mention," or whatever explanation was first proposed by the employer; the second takes into account any factor mentioned by an employer, with most employers being coded into several categories; the third uses a "holistic" approach in which we coded the comments according to what appeared to be the employers' main point. In many interviews, we specifically probed employers who reported multiple explanations with the question, "What do you think is the most important factor?" In other cases, this coding is based on our interpretation of the transcript. The main substantive conclusions are consistent across coding schemes, and where relevant, multiple measures are reported here.

8. An additional 10 percent cited "less inborn ability" as a major explanation, and 43 percent cited a "lack of chance for education." Respondents were allowed to choose more than one explanation, and thus, the categories do not sum to 100 percent (Hunt 2007, 400, Table 2).

9. Bobo, Johnson, and Suh's (2002) study draws data from the Los Angeles Study of Urban Inequality in which respondents were asked to rate members of a series of racial groups according to a range of characteristics (unintelligent, prefer welfare, hard to get along with, poor English).

10. Note that here (and in several other interviews), the job in question requires primarily manual work and few customer interactions. Jobs at a cleaning company or a moving company do not typically require professional dress, and yet, for these employers, a worker's attire sends an important signal about his reliability and commitment to work.

11. A number of other employers emphasized the perceptions of others about blacks as threatening or intimidating. For example, one employer said, "I think a lot of white people are scared of black people for some reason. I think they are scared of them, intimidated by them, they don't feel comfortable around them." Similarly, the manager of a small restaurant expressed concern over the aggressive demeanor of black men, stating that employers may be hesitant to call black applicants back because "immediately a black male is perceived as being aggressive." Although these perceptions may also be highly relevant for hiring decisions, we do not include these responses here as this analysis focuses on employers' own views about African Americans.

12. We asked separately about applicants and employees, given that effective employer screening would lead to a different distribution of characteristics among those seeking employment relative to those who become employed.

13. African American employers appeared slightly more inclined to notice racial differences among applicants but substantially less likely to report racial differences among employees. Immigrant employers noted more racial differences at both stages. Note, however, that our sample of African American and immigrant employers is small and that these indications must be taken as tentative.

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14. Even respondents who described just one negative event were coded among those who had observed racial differences.

15. While we cannot measure the influence of cultural stereotypes directly, several employers did explicitly comment on the ways in which cultural representations of black men in the media affected their perceptions of black men. According to one employer, "I'd probably say 90 percent of the crimes you see on TV are African Americans, female or male, and that's something that's in the back of your head, you know." Similarly, another employer commented, "We have the media sending all this negative information about the young black male. All this negative information constantly. . . . We are getting the wrong image of what they look like."

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Walking the Talk? What Employers Say Versus What They Do
Devah Pager; Lincoln Quillian
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Walking the Talk? What Employers Say Versus What They Do

Devah Pager
Princeton University

Lincoln Quillian
Northwestern University
University of Wisconsin–Madison

This article considers the relationship between employers' attitudes toward hiring ex-offenders and their actual hiring behavior. Using data from an experimental audit study of entry-level jobs matched with a telephone survey of the same employers, the authors compare employers' willingness to hire black and white ex-offenders, as represented both by their self-reports and by their decisions in actual hiring situations. Employers who indicated a greater likelihood of hiring ex-offenders in the survey were no more likely to hire an ex-offender in practice. Furthermore, although the survey results indicated no difference in the likelihood of hiring black versus white ex-offenders, audit results show large differences by race. These comparisons suggest that employer surveys—even those using an experimental design to control for social desirability bias—may be insufficient for drawing conclusions about the actual level of hiring discrimination against stigmatized groups.

In 1930, Richard LaPiere, a Stanford professor, traveled twice across the country by car with a young Chinese student and his wife. The purpose of the trip, unbeknown to his travel companions, was to assess the reactions of hotel and restaurant proprietors to the presence of Chinese customers. During the course of 251 visits to hotels, auto camps, restaurants, and cafes, only once were they refused service. Six months later, LaPiere mailed a survey to each of the proprietors in which one of the questions asked, "Will you accept members of the Chinese race as guests in your establishment?" More than 90 percent of the respondents indicated unequivocal refusal. The discrepancy between these proprietors' responses to the surveys and their actual behavior is indeed striking: Although nearly none of the proprietors expressed a willingness to accept the patronage of Chinese customers, virtually all of them did so when confronted with the situation (LaPiere 1934). If we were to make generalizations based on either the survey results or the field study alone, we would develop radically different views on the level of racial hostility toward the Chinese at that time in history.

LaPiere's study provides a much needed reality check for researchers who rely on expressed attitudes for insight into the nature and causes of discriminatory behavior. Unfortunately, there have been very few efforts to provide the kind of comparison offered in LaPiere's study. Measures from surveys often are accepted as an adequate proxy for behaviors, with little effort to validate this assumption.

The current article seeks to make headway in this discussion, following up on the insights provided by LaPiere more than 70 years ago. In this discussion, we compare the self-reported

Direct all correspondence to Devah Pager, Department of Sociology, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08544 (pager@princeton.edu). Support for this research includes grants from the National Science Foundation (SES-0101236), the National Institute of Justice (2002-IJ-CX-0002), the Joyce Foundation, and the Soros Foundation. The views expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the granting agencies. The authors are grateful to Harry Holzer, Michael Stoll, and Steven Raphael for sharing their survey instrument with us. The authors received helpful comments and suggestions from Bruce Western, Harry Holzer, Jeff Manza, Paul DiMaggio, Susan Fiske, and from the *ASR* editor and anonymous *ASR* reviewers.

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attitudes exhibited by a sample of Milwaukee employers with their actual behavior in real-life employment situations. By placing our analysis within the context of research on discrimination in contemporary labor markets we hope to underscore the degree to which method matters in our interrogation of the social world.

RACIAL ATTITUDES, DISCRIMINATION, AND CONTEMPORARY LABOR MARKET INEQUALITY

In the years since LaPiere's study, much has changed about race relations in the contemporary United States. In present times, it would be extremely rare to find respondents willing to state racial objections as candidly as those reported in LaPiere's survey. Indeed, trends in racial attitudes demonstrate steady movement toward the endorsement of equal treatment by race and the repudiation of direct discrimination. According to surveys conducted in the 1940s and 1950s, for example, fewer than half of whites believed that white students should go to school with black students or that black and white job applicants should have an equal chance at getting a job. In contrast, by the 1990s, more than 90 percent of white survey respondents endorsed the principle that white and black students and job applicants should be treated equally by schools and employers (Schuman et al. 2001).

Consistent with these trends, many indicators of social and economic status show that African-Americans have made great strides in approaching parity with whites. Blacks, for example, are now nearly equal to whites in rates of high school completion, and have become increasingly well-represented in occupational sectors previously dominated by whites (Farley 1997; Mare 1995; Wilson 1978). Likewise, in the decade after the Civil Rights Movement, and again during the 1990s, the wage gap between black and white workers was substantially reduced (Couch and Daly 2002; Harrison and Bennett 1995; but see Western and Pettit forthcoming). The rapid social mobility among blacks in the United States provides support for the notion that the progressive trends apparent in measures of racial attitudes reflect a real shift in the opportunities now available to African-Americans. In fact, these positive indicators have led some prominent academics to proclaim the problem of discrimination solved. Economist James Heckman, for example, has asserted that "most of the disparity in earnings between blacks and whites in the labor market of the 1990s is due to the differences in skills they bring to the market, and not to discrimination within the labor market." He went on to refer to labor market discrimination as "the problem of an earlier era" (Heckman 1998:101–102). Indeed, for many observers of contemporary race relations, the barrier of discrimination appears to have withered away, leaving blacks the opportunity to pursue unfettered upward mobility.

And yet, despite the many signs of progress, there remain important forms of social and economic inequality that continue to differentiate the experiences of black and white Americans. According to many indicators, blacks, and black men in particular, continue to lag far behind their white counterparts. Some indicators show black men doing steadily worse. African-Americans, for example, experience roughly double the rate of unemployment experienced by whites, with very little sign of change over time. Likewise, rates of joblessness among young black men have been rising over time (Holzer, Offner, and Sorensen 2005).

As a further troubling indicator, many of these young black men, instead of making their way through school and into jobs, are instead increasingly finding themselves housed in an expanding number of correctional facilities. Approximately 1 in 3 black men will spend some time in prison over his lifetime, as compared with only 1 in 17 white men (Bonczar 2003). Among young black high school dropouts, this figure rises to nearly 60 percent. Rivaling other conventional social institutions—such as military service, employment, and marriage, incarceration has now become a typical event in the life course of young disadvantaged men (Pettit and Western 2004).

How can we explain the discrepancies between these varied measures? On the one hand, the progressive trends in racial attitudes may reflect a genuine openness among white Americans to racial integration and equality. In this case, the continuing difficulties facing segments of the black population may simply reflect the "bumpy road" on an otherwise steady trajectory toward racial parity (Gans 1992).

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Further, white racial attitudes are not the only barrier to black mobility. Changes in the economic structure, family composition, and crime policy, among other factors, may each exert an exogenous influence on the black population in ways that inhibit mobility, independent of the racial openness of contemporary institutions. From this perspective, continuing black disadvantage could be explained by a reasonable lag between changing attitudes and outcomes, as well as by the multiple influences that shape patterns of racial inequality.

On the other hand, traditional survey measures of racial attitudes may not accurately reflect the degree to which race continues to shape the opportunities available to African-Americans. Indeed, a great deal of evidence suggests that racial stereotypes remain firmly embedded in the American consciousness, affecting perceptions of and interactions with racial minorities even among respondents who overtly endorse the principle of equal treatment (Devine and Elliot 1995). Substantial levels of discrimination have likewise been detected by experimental field studies, which find consistent evidence of racial bias against black applicants in housing, credit, and employment markets (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Turner, Fix, and Struyk 1991; Yinger 1995). As a further reflection of lived experience, the large majority of blacks continue to perceive discrimination as routine in matters of jobs, income, and housing (Feagin and Sikes 1994).

Given the available information, it is difficult to evaluate the extent to which direct discrimination plays a role in shaping the opportunities available to blacks in contemporary society. Surveys of racial attitudes portray one optimistic picture, whereas indicators of economic and social inequality present more mixed results. It is only through direct comparisons of these differing measures that we can assess how and why they may project such divergent conclusions.

In this article, we focus on the specific issue of employment discrimination. Substantively, we are interested in assessing the degree to which employer preferences or biases influence the opportunities available to stigmatized workers. Methodologically, we seek to assess the degree to which choice of measurement strategy affects our understanding of these processes. In our analysis of survey data and behavioral outcomes, we engage with LaPiere's central concern about the correspondence between measured attitudes and behaviors.

We begin with a review of the literature on the attitude–behavior relationship since LaPiere's study, focusing specifically on the case of attitudes toward and treatment of stigmatized groups. We then turn to concerns regarding the use of survey measures as proxies for measures of discrimination. Finally, we discuss the results from a matched field experiment and telephone survey that are the basis of our empirical results. Throughout this discussion, we seek to emphasize that investigations of important substantive concerns cannot be separated from a discussion of the methods by which these investigations take place.

ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

Understandings of the Attitude–Behavior Relationship

Attitude questions are frequently asked because they are believed to be illuminating about one or more behaviors of interest. One of the most common uses of attitude research is to assess prejudices, stereotypes, and other measures of social distance with the goal of gaining insight about the nature of discriminatory behavior (National Research Council 2004). Attitude questions have been widely used as tools to assist in understanding the basis of behaviors such as discrimination in employment (Bobo, Johnson, and Suh 2000), residential mobility related to white flight (Farley et al. 1994, Krysan 2002), and the influence of race on voting patterns (Sniderman and Piazza 1993).

Because of the difficulty of gathering data on discrimination in natural settings, many substantive sociological studies of discrimination rely on easier-to-gather survey or interview data in the place of behavioral measures. Some studies focus on attitudinal indicators alone, leaving the connection to behavior implicit. Others ask respondents about past behavior or anticipated behavior in response to hypothetical situations. A wide range of survey scales and specific survey techniques have been developed to measure specific forms of prejudice and discrimination (National Research Council, 2004, chapter 8).

As one important example, a survey technique that has become increasingly popular for

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assessing situational discrimination involves use of the vignette question, which elicits reactions from respondents about fairly detailed hypothetical scenarios (Sniderman and Grob 1996). An influential early example of the vignette method was developed by Reynolds Farley and colleagues for a better understanding of the attitudinal sources of racial segregation (Farley, Bianchi, and Colosanto 1979; Farley et al. 1978; Farley et al. 1994). With Farley's approach, respondents are asked to express the level of discomfort they would experience living in hypothetical neighborhoods of varying racial compositions, and to estimate the likelihood that they would move out of such neighborhoods. Farley's innovative technique has become widely used in subsequent research, in part because it is easily combined with experimental survey techniques (discussed in the next section) (Emerson, Yancey, and Chai 2001; Krysan 2002).

A key assumption of vignette studies is that reported hypothetical behavior is an accurate proxy for the behavior that would be observed if the respondent actually encountered the situation. In the case of vignette studies that attempt to illuminate the process of white flight, for example, the assumption is that respondents who say they would feel discomfort or would move is highly related to the behavior of moving out (or not moving in) that would occur if the respondent actually lived in the hypothetical neighborhood. Although a perfect attitude–behavior correspondence is not required, these studies make the assumption that the two are related. An almost complete separation between attitudes and corresponding behaviors would undermine the rationale behind most attitudinal studies.

The expectation of attitude–behavior correspondence results naturally from the view that human action is the product of conscious mental states. Several psychologists, most notably Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), have formally modeled the relationship between these components to describe the formation of attitudes and their subsequent influence on behavior. In their model, feelings or beliefs about an object give rise to positive or negative evaluations of the object. These evaluations then influence behavioral intentions, which ultimately influence behavior (Ajzen 2001; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). If attitudes can be measured successfully by survey questions or interviews, then these should have at least some power to predict overall patterns of behavior toward the attitude object.

Despite the clarity and intuitive appeal of this model, what is most striking about past investigations of the attitude–behavior relationship is the wide range of correlations reported across different studies. Both Deutscher (1966) and Wicker (1969), for example, review a number of studies that find virtually no relationship between attitudes and behaviors. Schuman and Johnson (1976) also discusses a number of notable studies in which a zero or negative correlation between attitudes and behaviors was found. In their review, however, they conclude that a majority of research on the attitude–behavior relationship finds a moderate positive relationship. With examples for each extreme, their article reports correlations close to zero among attitude–behavior assessments of racial bias and transient economic transactions, while demonstrating correlations exceeding .85 among studies of voting behavior. Most others are shown to fall somewhere in between (Schuman and Johnson 1976).

This literature supports the conclusion that no simple formula can describe the attitude–behavior relationship. Rather, tremendous variation exists in the measurement of attitudes and their associated behaviors, and assumptions about their correspondence should be reviewed with caution.

Attitudes And Behavior Toward Stigmatized Groups

Despite the appeal of using attitudinal measures as proxies for behavior, particularly for hard-to-measure behaviors such as discrimination, a number of factors complicate the relationship between verbal expressions on surveys and actual behaviors directed toward members of stigmatized groups. First, social surveys have long been plagued by the problem of social desirability, or the phenomenon that respondents seek to give socially appropriate answers to questions, even if this involves distorting the truth (Bradburn 1983). In the contemporary United States, the norms of racial equality are so strong that survey respondents are unlikely to feel comfortable expressing negative opinions about members of other racial groups (Crandall

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1994). When asked questions about race or other sensitive issues, respondents may be led by these pressures to shift their opinions subtly (or in some cases not so subtly) in the direction of answers they perceive to be the most socially acceptable. To the extent that real-world discrimination continues, this has the effect of biasing survey results in the direction of politically correct, nonprejudicial responses, and of weakening the relationship between measured attitudes and behavior.

Researchers have adopted creative techniques to minimize the problem of social desirability bias, using experimental survey designs to avoid direct group comparisons. These methods build on the split-ballot survey design, in which randomly chosen subsamples of a survey are primed with one of several variants of a survey question to assess responses to a particular group or condition (Sniderman and Grob 1996).[1] For instance, Schuman and Bobo (1988) used a split-ballot design in which half the sample was asked about objections to a Japanese family moving into their neighborhood, while the other half was asked about objections to a black family moving into their neighborhood. Had each respondent been asked about both a black and a Japanese family on the same survey, they may have biased their responses toward similar evaluations of the two groups, consistent with norms of equal treatment. Through statistical comparisons across the two groups, split-ballot studies are thought to produce valid population-level estimates of the importance of race for the question of interest while reducing concerns about social desirability bias that arise from direct racial comparisons. Experimental survey designs have clear advantages for the measurement of sensitive topics, and their results have indeed shown a greater incidence of prejudice than those from traditional survey designs (Schuman 1995; Schuman and Bobo 1988).

[1] As the name implies, split-ballot designs commonly use two experimental groups. More recent work has taken advantage of computer-assisted telephone interviewing to extend this design to include many more variations in survey questions, including variation across multiple dimensions (see Sniderman and Grob 1996 for a review).

We view social desirability bias, then, as a problem that has received substantial attention in the research literature, with some promising developments. Nevertheless, to our knowledge, no research has provided a behavioral validation of experimental survey results. We have little concrete evidence, therefore, with which to evaluate when and to what degree experimental survey measures are in fact accurate proxies for behavior.

A second problem in using attitudinal measures as proxy assessments for discriminatory behavior concerns the emphasis of this method on consciously held beliefs or feelings. With the use of such measures, subjects are typically prompted for their attitudes in ways that allow for some degree of conscious deliberation. However, a growing literature in psychology has documented the existence and influence of implicit attitudes toward stigmatized groups that may influence judgments and actions without conscious awareness (Devine 1989). The intrapsychic processes that promote discrimination are likely to be more strongly activated in the context of a live interaction than in the abstract context of a survey question (Fiske 2004). Discrimination resulting from these interaction-triggered implicit stereotypes would necessarily remain undetected in survey responses, even those using an experimental design.

Creating a similar problem, some measured forms of discrimination may be perceptible only in the context of direct interaction. Social psychological evidence suggests that whites commonly experience heightened levels of social discomfort in the presence of blacks, at times leading to behaviors that are in effect discriminatory despite (accurately reported) nonprejudicial attitudes (Poskocil 1977). For instance, Word, Zanna, and Cooper (1974) show that white subjects conducting mock interviews with trained black applicants make more speech errors, ask fewer questions, and terminate interviews more quickly than with similar white applicants (see also Dovidio, Kawakami, and Gaertner 2002). Again, because these forms of discomfort are activated only by direct social contact—not by questions about hypothetical situations or prejudicial attitudes—these alternate psychological sources of discriminatory behaviors are unlikely to be captured by questions on survey instruments.

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Finally, discriminatory action often is strongly influenced by situational factors, further reducing the extent of attitude–behavior correspondence. Complex decisions about where discrimination may be expressed are influenced by a combination of prevailing social norms as well as context-specific considerations (Merton 1949). In hiring, for instance, employers must balance their need for employees, the applicant pool, and other situational contingencies together with their taste for applicants along several dimensions. These situational factors can sometimes overwhelm the influence of prejudice in discriminatory action, resulting in a low correspondence between the two.

Indeed, it is notable, for example, that LaPiere's (1934) study found higher levels of racial bias apparent in the survey responses than in the field situation. Similar studies by Kutner, Wilkins, and Yarrow (1952) and Saenger and Gilbert (1950)—but focused on discrimination against blacks rather than the Chinese—report similarly counterintuitive results. These findings are especially remarkable in light of the contemporary literature on social desirability bias, which overwhelmingly assumes that survey reports will tend to underestimate the amount of discrimination that will occur. We believe the direction of the discrepancy between self-reports and behavior in these three studies most likely results from the importance of situational factors (Ajzen 1991). In the context of these studies, open discrimination likely would have involved some direct interpersonal confrontation. Unlike the decision not to call someone back for a job interview (a relatively passive form of discrimination), the refusal of service, or other more active forms of discriminatory treatment, can impose significant social costs.[2] In LaPiere's investigation, for example, the discriminator risked creating an uncomfortable interpersonal situation, possibly resulting in a scene. In certain cases, then, behaviors may be constrained in ways that verbal expressions are not, again leading to a lower correspondence between the two.

The historical evolution of strong norms against openly racist statements makes it less likely that contemporary field studies would find nearly as high a level of openly expressed prejudice as found in the aforementioned three studies (Schuman et al. 2001). And more recent, if indirect, comparisons of attitudes and behaviors usually have found stronger signs of racial discrimination in behaviors than in self-reports of behavioral intentions (Crosby, Bromley, and Saxe 1980). At the same time, it remains plausible that situational factors could still result in higher levels of stated than actual discrimination in certain cases, depending on the context and the attitudinal instrument.

The complexities involved in the relationship between attitudes and behaviors toward stigmatized groups emphasize the need for careful assessments of our measurement tools. The links between these measured attitudes and observed behaviors require systematic evaluation. Unfortunately, despite the frequent use of verbal expressions to draw conclusions about behaviors, very few studies directly calibrate survey responses with corresponding behavioral assessments.

Explicit Studies of Prejudice–Discrimination Correspondence

Whereas the sociological literature on the attitude–behavior relationship is small, the recent literature on the specific attitude–behavior case of prejudice and discrimination (in sociology) is virtually nonexistent.[3] Indeed, we turned instead to research in psychology for guidance in these matters. Social psychologist Susan Fiske (2004), in a recent, comprehensive meta-analysis, examine 54 studies containing empirical investigations of prejudice–discrimination correspondence. Consistent with the findings from the attitude–behavior literature more generally, Fiske finds wide variation in the relationship between prejudice and discrimination

[2] Laboratory studies have found that whites behave more aggressively toward blacks than toward other whites, but only when the consequences to the aggressor are low, such as when acting under conditions of anonymity, or in situations with limited possibility of retaliation or punishment (Crosby et al. 1980).

[3] Prejudice refers to negative judgments or opinions about a group (attitudes). Discrimination refers to unfavorable treatment directed toward members of a group (behavior).

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across studies, with correlations ranging from −.38 to .69, with a mean of .26. Her results thus support a general association between prejudice and discrimination, albeit at low average levels and with great variability across situations (see also Schutz and Six 1996).

The Fiske (2004) review, primarily featuring the work of psychologists, shows that sociologists have largely abandoned the study of prejudice–discrimination correspondence since the mid-1970s. Of the 10 articles in sociology journals included in the Fiske review, the most recent was published in 1973. This is not because sociologists have stopped using attitudinal measures and survey items to study discrimination against marginalized groups, as demonstrated by reviews such as those of Krysan (1999) and Schuman et al. (2001). Rather, sociologists have done little recent work to validate the assumption that these attitudinal measures are associated with discrimination. Krysan's (1999) review, for instance, notes the issue of attitude–behavior correspondence, but does not cite any recent studies on the topic. Instead, Krysan points to the similar trend directions for racial attitude items and corresponding behavioral indicators from unrelated samples and studies (Krysan 1999:139). Evidence of this sort does support a correspondence of attitude and behavior toward stigmatized groups, but only weakly so because a similar trend direction of indicators over time provides only very general evidence of meaningful correspondence.

In contrast to sociologists, among psychologists, the correspondence of attitudes and behavior toward stigmatized groups continues to be the subject of considerable research. Psychological research of this type has provided several important insights into the correspondence between different types of attitudes and behaviors, pointing to, for example, varying relationships between explicit/conscious attitudes, implicit/unconscious attitudes, and various forms of behavior (Dovidio et al. 2002). From a sociological standpoint, however, these studies have some important limitations, most notably those arising from a reliance on behavioral measures obtained in laboratory settings. For instance, the studies Fiske (2004) reviews use outcome behaviors such as ratings of perceived friendliness in interaction with a mock interviewer, subtle behavioral measures such as the number of blinks and the length of eye contact, or the results of role-playing situations. These outcomes often are far removed from the actual decisions made in their social contexts—to hire, to rent, or to move, to name a few—that are most relevant to understanding the behavioral processes that produce disadvantage among members of stigmatized groups.

For our purposes, the most relevant studies comparing prejudice and discrimination are those that assess these factors in realistic social settings, focusing on forms of discrimination that produce meaningful social disparities. Unfortunately, the three studies that fit this description each were conducted more than 50 years ago (Kutner et al. 1952; LaPiere 1934; Saenger and Gilbert 1950). We have very few means by which to assess the correspondence between contemporary racial attitudes and the incidence of discrimination.

Employer Attitudes and Hiring Decisions

The current study provides an opportunity to investigate these processes in a contemporary context. Bringing together a unique combination of data, we present a direct comparison of self-reported attitudes and corresponding behavior in the context of a real-world setting with important implications for inequality. The substantive focus of this study is on employers' willingness to hire blacks and/or ex-offenders for an entry-level position in their company. In both cases, the sensitive topics under investigation lead us to question the use of employer reports alone. By calibrating the estimates we received from surveys with behavioral measures from an experimental audit study, we are able to gain insight into the consistency between these two important indicators of group preference.

Measures of attitudes come in many forms, ranging from abstract statements of feelings (e.g., "I don't like members of group X") to more concrete statements of intended action (e.g., "I would not hire members of group X"). The latter, referred to as behavioral intentions, are considered the form of attitude that should most closely correspond to observed behavior, because of their conceptualization in terms of specific measurable action (Fishbein 1967; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975; Schuman and Johnson 1976). Thus a weak relation between behavioral intentions and behavior suggests an even weaker relation between the behavior and more

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general attitudinal measures. In the current study, we rely on the behavioral intentions expressed by employers as an indicator of their attitudes about blacks and ex-offenders. Comparing what employers said they would do in a hypothetical hiring situation with what we observed them doing in a real hiring situation forms the basis of our current investigation.

METHODS

In the first stage of the study, employers' responses to job applicants were measured in real employment settings using an experimental audit methodology. Between June and December of 2001, matched pairs of young men (testers) were sent to apply for a total of 350 entry-level job openings in the Milwaukee metropolitan area.[4] The two white testers (one with a fictional criminal record and one without) applied for one set of randomly selected jobs (n = 150), and the two black testers (using profiles identical to those of the white pair) applied for a second set of jobs (n = 200).[5] The preferences of employers were measured based on the number of call-backs to each of the applicants, as registered by four independent voice mail boxes. Additional voice mail boxes were set up for calls to references listed on the testers' resumes.

[4] Jobs were randomly selected from ads placed in the Sunday classified section of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and on Jobnet, a state-sponsored Internet job site. Entry-levels jobs are defined as those requiring no more than a high school degree and limited work experience. Testers were 23-year-old college students from Milwaukee chosen for their effective styles of self-presentation and for their comparability in terms of physical and interpersonal attributes.

[5] The tester pair rotated which member presented himself as the ex-offender for each successive week of employment searches, such that each tester served in the criminal record condition for an equal number of cases. By varying which member of the pair presented himself as having a criminal record, unobserved differences within the pairs of applicants were effectively controlled. The criminal record used in all cases was a felony drug conviction. Although the more general term "ex-offenders" is used in reference to this group, it is important to note that the relationship between attitudes and behaviors may differ for individuals convicted of different crimes.

For a more detailed discussion of the research design, see Pager (2003).

The findings of the audit showed large and significant effects of both race and criminal record on employment opportunities. Call-backs were received by 34 percent of whites with no criminal record, 17 percent of whites with criminal records, 14 percent of blacks without criminal records, and 5 percent of blacks with criminal records (Pager 2003). Thus, overall, blacks and ex-offenders were one-half to one-third as likely to be considered by employers, with black ex-offenders suffering the greatest disadvantage.

The second stage of the study provided employers with the opportunity to express their hiring preferences verbally in the context of a telephone survey. Several months after completion of the audit study, each of the 350 employers was called by interviewers from the Michigan State Survey Research Center and asked to participate in a telephone survey about employers' hiring preferences and practices (see Pager [2002] for more detailed discussion of the survey instrument and results). Calls were directed to the person in charge of hiring for each establishment. The final survey sample included 199 respondents, representing a 58 percent response rate (Appendix A).

During the course of this survey, employers were read a vignette describing a job applicant with characteristics designed to match closely the profile of the testers in the audit study. Employers who had been audited by white testers were read a vignette in which the hypothetical applicant was white, and employers who had been audited by black testers were read a vignette in which the applicant was black. In this way, the survey design mirrored the split-ballot procedures used by Sniderman and Piazza (1993) and Schuman and Bobo (1988), avoiding direct racial comparisons within the same survey.

The wording of the vignette was as follows:

> Chad is a 23-year-old [black/white] male. He finished high school and has steady work experience in entry-level jobs. He has good references and interacts well with people. About a year ago, Chad was convicted of a drug felony and served 12 months in prison. Chad was released last month and is now looking for a job. How likely would you be to hire Chad for an entry-level opening in your company?

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Employers were asked to rate their likelihood of hiring this applicant with the following range of responses: very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, and very unlikely.

The vignette presented in the survey was designed to correspond closely to the profile of the testers in the audit study. Chad, the hypothetical applicant, was presented with levels of education, experience, and personal qualifications similar to those on the resumes presented by the testers. The type of crime was identical, although the prison sentence in the vignette (12 months) was shorter than that reported in the audit study (18 months).[6] Thus the vignette aimed to measure employers' self-reports concerning how they would respond to such an applicant, whereas the audit measured how they actually did respond to an applicant with almost identical characteristics. The parallel scenarios of the vignette and audit should maximize the correspondence between the two measures (Schuman and Johnson 1976).

In the current study, the primary outcome of interest represents the employers' willingness to hire an applicant depending on his race and criminal background. As described earlier, in the survey, employers were asked to report how likely they would be to hire the applicant described in the vignette. In the actual employment situations, by contrast, we measured the number of employers who responded positively to testers after they had submitted their application. In most cases, this simply involved the employer inviting the tester to come in for an interview, although in a few cases, the applicant was offered the job on the spot. As we later discuss, the behavioral indicator should thus provide a highly inclusive measure of "willingness to hire," given that a call-back represents only an initial step in the hiring process.

RESULTS

In the following section, we examine the relationship between the survey results and the audit study. Initially, we compare the *level* of willingness to hire blacks and ex-offenders indicated by the audit results and the survey. We then examine the *association* between the two measures, considering whether employers who indicated high willingness to hire ex-offenders in the survey called back testers in the criminal record condition at higher rates than those who indicated low willingness to hire in the survey. In each of these comparisons, we seek to assess the degree to which what employers say is accurately reflected in what they do.

Figure 1 presents the key results from both data sources. The first two columns represent the percentage of employers who reported that they would be "very likely" or "somewhat likely" to hire the hypothetical applicant, depending on whether he was presented as white or black. We include the "somewhat likely" group here to correspond to our behavioral measure, which is a call-back rather than an actual hire (see discussion below).

The second two columns represent results from the audit study, illustrating the percentage of call-backs received by each group. In the audit study, call-backs also can be considered a measure of "willingness to hire," given that this represents a first cut in the hiring process. Although a call-back is by no means a guarantee of employment, given that employers typically call back several applicants before selecting their preferred hire, it does indicate a favorable initial review.

The results of the two outcomes, however, are anything but comparable. As Figure 1 shows, employers reported a far greater willingness to hire drug offenders in the survey than was found in the audit. In the survey, more than 60 percent of the employers said they were somewhat or very likely to hire a drug offender irrespective of the applicant's race. In the audit, by contrast, only 17 percent of white and 5 percent of black applicants with drug felonies actually received a call-back.[7]

The disparities apparent in these results are extremely consequential for our understanding of the social world. In the survey data, employ-

[6] The length of sentence was varied moderately between survey and audit to avoid arousing suspicion.

[7] Call-back rates include all the employers from the audit study, even those who did not complete the survey. Including only respondents captured in both samples produces even more disparate results. Call-back rates for white and black ex-offenders in the overlapping sample are 14 and 3 percent, respectively, demonstrating an even greater distance from the survey results.

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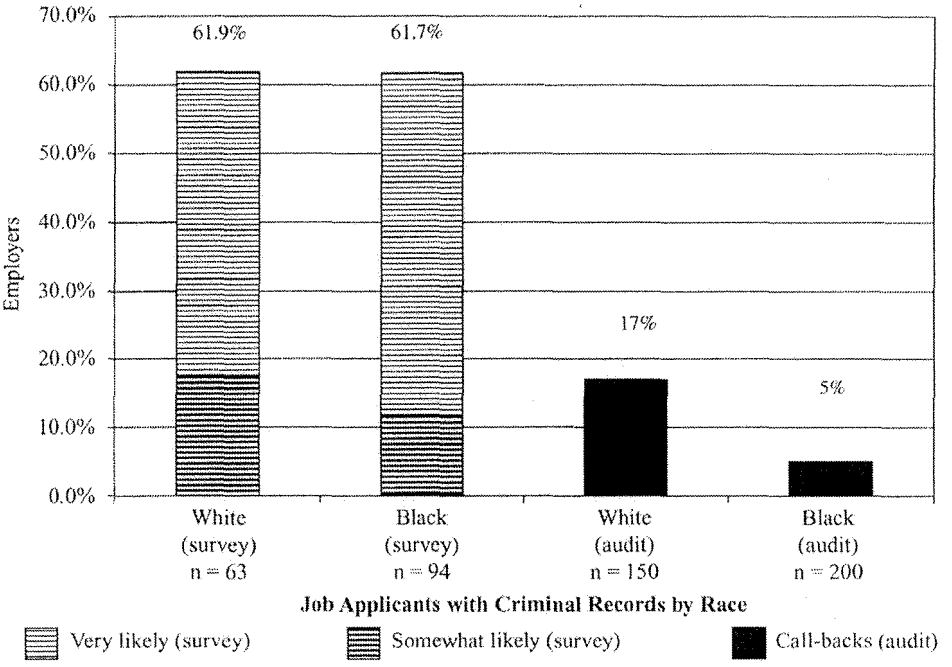

Figure 1. Expressed Willingness to Hire a Drug Offender According to Employer Survey and Audit

Note: Survey results include employers who said they were "very likely" or "somewhat likely" to hire the hypothetical applicant (with "very" at bottom of columns). Audit results represent the percentage of call-backs for each group. Differences between within-race comparisons of survey and audit results are significant on the basis of a two-sample test of proportions ($p < .05$)

ers' responses present a view of openness to blacks or applicants with drug felonies that is far greater than the reality measured in actual hiring situations. Accepting the survey results as an accurate indicator of the opportunities available to blacks and ex-offenders would grossly understate the barriers to employment they face.

Although the results of this initial comparison are compelling, there remain several possible objections to equating the findings from our survey measure with those from the audit study. First, collapsing the categories of "very" and "somewhat" into one category may artificially exaggerate the distance between survey and audit results. Indeed, if we look only at the "very likely" category, the discrepancy is far less striking. There is a literature on the meaning of vague quantifiers that attempts to offer greater precision to our understanding of these terms (Pace and Friedlander, 1982; Schaeffer, 1991). Lichtenstein and Newman (1967), for example, report that respondents assigned a mean probability of .87 to the phrase "very likely" and a mean probability of .59 to the phrase "somewhat likely." Whatever the exact probabilities to which these terms correspond, this literature indicates that such phrases imply a greater likelihood of hire than not. Remember that employers with greater reservations about the applicant also had the option of "somewhat unlikely" to indicate their ambivalence.

Whereas the survey asked employers to rate their likelihood of *hiring* the applicant, the audit merely measured whether the applicant was invited back for an interview or not. Although a call-back may represent a necessary condition to the decision to hire, it is by no means sufficient. In fact, according to the survey results, employers reported interviewing an average of eight applicants for the last noncollege job they had filled. Furthermore, employers on average reported interviewing 55 percent of the applicants that applied (Pager, 2002). Although these self-reported estimates may be inflated, they provide some evidence that the interview stage is far from synonymous with a hire. Rather, a call-back may in fact represent a fairly low bar of approval.

Thus, despite the different metrics on which our measures are based, we believe they provide roughly comparable indications of interest in the

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applicant, corresponding to a moderately favorable review. In the results presented later, we provide an analysis of individual-level correlations that should be unaffected by these concerns.

A second possible objection to this comparison is that the very framing of the vignette item may artificially exaggerate the difference between survey and audit results. When considering a hypothetical applicant, employers do not have to take into account alternative possibilities among the applicant pool. Thus the hypothetical applicant may exceed the minimum threshold for acceptability even if in actuality there tend to be other applicants who are better qualified. By contrast, the tester in the audit study is competing with a pool of real applicants of varying quality. To the extent that real applicants provide better qualifications than does the tester's profile, the tester will receive few call-backs for reasons unrelated to race or criminal record.

An alternative way of presenting the information that addresses this concern is to calculate the likelihood that a tester with a criminal record will receive a call-back *relative to* a white tester without a criminal record. White testers without criminal records in this case represent a kind of baseline, presenting a given set of qualifications common among all testers, but without the handicaps of minority status or a criminal record. Employers who made call-backs to white testers without criminal records signaled that this level of education and experience was sufficiently desirable to make the first cut. Relative to this baseline, we can assess the proportion of blacks and whites with criminal records who received call-backs, thereby reducing the effect of employer nonresponses attributable to extraneous factors.[8]

Figure 2 displays the results of this procedure, comparing the likelihood of hire based on the survey and audit results with audit results recalculated as a ratio of the percentage of testers in the offender condition who received call-backs to the percentage of white testers with identical qualifications but no criminal background who received call-backs. Overall, 34 percent of white applicants with no criminal records, and with the given set of human capital characteristics presented by all testers, received call-backs. This group serves as our baseline (denominator) for calculating the relative call-back rates for the other groups. Only 17 percent of white testers with identical characteristics plus a criminal record received call-backs, indicating that white testers with a criminal record were 50 percent as likely to receive call-backs as those without a criminal record (Figure 2). Black ex-offenders were the least likely to continue in the employment process—only 5 percent received call-backs—indicating that they were just less than 15 percent as likely to receive a call-back as a similar white tester without a criminal record.

The differences between self-reports and behaviors in this comparison, although smaller, remain consistent when call-back frequency is judged relative to that for white non-offenders. In the case of white ex-offenders, the distance between the survey and audit results has narrowed substantially, although it remains marginally significant statistically. The case for black applicants, on the other hand, maintains a clear and dramatic difference. Even relative to contemporaneous call-back rates for white testers, the call-back rate for black ex-offenders (14.7) remains far short of the survey estimates of hiring likelihoods (61.7). For black ex-offenders, the survey and audit measures provide dramatically different indications of willingness to hire.

Whatever measure is used, two main findings remain clear: First, whereas the survey responses present a rather benign view of the employment barriers facing ex-offenders, the audit results tell a very different story. Employers indicate a high level of willingness to hire drug offenders, but in actual employment situations,

[8] Similarly, we can consider the proportion of employers who reported that they were likely to hire an ex-offender (61.9 or 61.7 percent) as relative to an implicit baseline of 100 percent for a hypothetical applicant similar to the one described in the vignette, but without a criminal record. To the extent that some employers would report it not likely that they would hire such an applicant (if, for example, they hire only applicants with college experience), the ratio of the self-reported likelihoods of hiring an ex-offender relative to a nonoffender would be even larger, thus rendering the contrast between the self-reports and behavioral outcomes even greater.

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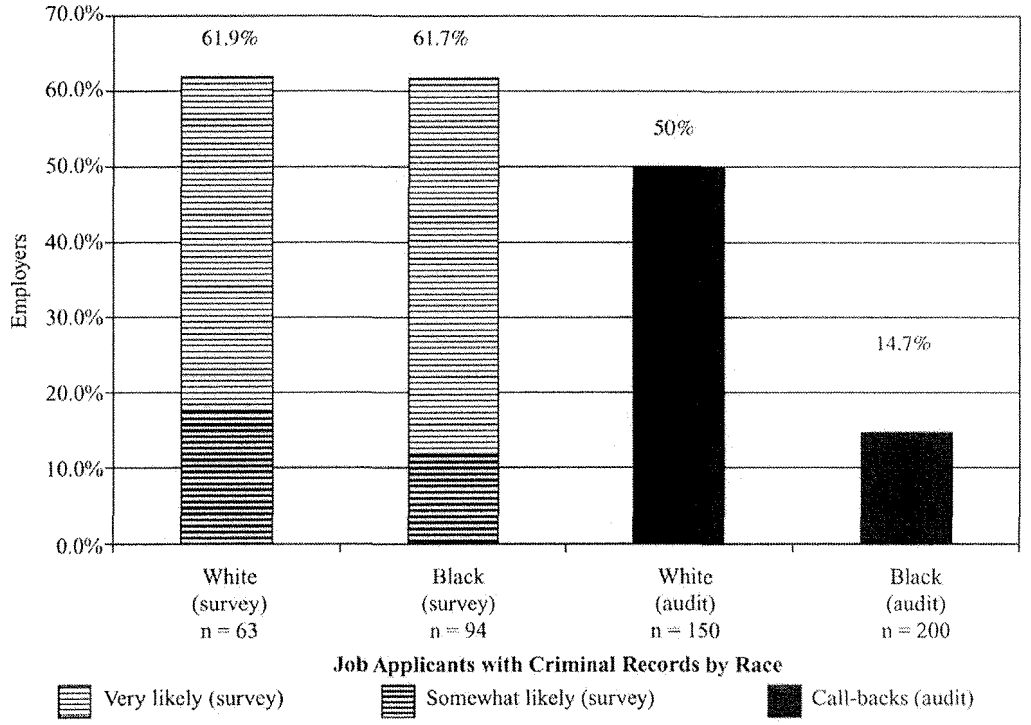

Figure 2. Expressed Willingness to Hire a Drug Offender According to Employer Survey and Recalibrated Audit

Note: Survey results include employers who said they were "very likely" or "somewhat likely" to hire the hypothetical applicant (with "very" at bottom of columns). Audit results represent the ratio of the percentage of call-backs for each group to the percentage of call-backs for white nonoffenders. Differences in within-race comparisons of survey and audit results are marginally significant for white applicants ($p < .06$) and significant for black applicants ($p < .05$) on the basis of a two-sample test of proportions.

they are less than half as likely even to call back such applicants relative to those without criminal records. This result underscores the importance of using great caution in relying on employers' self-reports as an accurate reflection of behavior.

Second, the degree to which race is a factor in hiring decisions is virtually undetectable in the survey results, in sharp contrast to what we find in the audit study. Table 1 shows the relative risk of receiving a call-back for white and black applicants in the survey and audit. In the survey, although separate employers were asked the vignette in which the hypothetical applicant was white or black, the estimates of hiring likelihoods for both applicants were virtually identical.[9] By contrast, actual behavioral measures in the audit show that white ex-offenders are more than three times as likely to receive consideration from employers as black ex-offenders.[10] These results suggest that employer surveys, even those with split-ballot designs, do not always provide an effective way to gauge the degree to which sensitive characteristics such as race affect actual employment opportunities. Later, we discuss the methodological and theoretical processes that might account for these differences.

Finally, we turn to the issue of individual-level consistency between survey reports and audit results. Even if the *levels* of openness to hiring ex-offenders are inconsistent between survey and audit, it remains possible that a *correlation* exists between the two: Employers who indicate

[9] Even if we were to restrict our attention to the "very likely" category, the black–white ratio (1.5) still would vastly understate the degree of racial disparity apparent in the audit.

[10] This result is calculated as a ratio of the call-back rate for white drug offenders (25/150) relative to the call-back rate for black drug offenders (10/200).

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Table 1. Comparison of the Influence of Race on Hiring: Audit versus Survey

Relative Willingness to Hire	Survey	Audit
White vs. Black (White/Black)	1.00	3.33
95% CI	(.78, 1.29)	(1.65, 6.73)

Note: The difference in white/black ratios between the survey and audit is statistically significant at $p < .001$ (Mantel–Haenszel test, $\chi^2 = 12.01$, 1 df).

Table 2. Individual-level Consistency between Employers' Self-reports and Behavioral Outcomes

	Audit Results (for Testers Presenting Drug Felony)	
Survey Results	No Call-Back	Call-Back
Likely to Hire Drug Offender		
No	56 (93.3 %)	4 (6.7 %)
Yes	89 (92.7 %)	7 (7.3 %)
Difference of Percentages (95% CI)		0.6% (–8.6%, 8.8%)
Correlation (Kendall's Tau-b) (95% CI)		.012 (–.143, .167)

Note: This table includes all employers who responded to the survey. Call-backs in the right column above represent calls to the tester in the criminal record condition only.

willingness to hire ex-offenders may be more likely to hire an ex-offender than employers who do not indicate such willingness, even if the overall openness to hiring ex-offenders is strongly overstated in the survey results. This final analysis allows us to compare the survey responses with the audit outcomes at an individual rather than an aggregate level. The results of this cross-tabulation are presented in Table 2.[11] Consistent with the results reported earlier, we find that the survey responses have very little connection to the actual behaviors exhibited by these employers.

Among those who reported a favorable likelihood of hiring an applicant with a prior drug conviction in the survey, 7.3 percent made calls to the tester with the criminal record in the audit study, relative to 6.7 percent of those expressing an unfavorable likelihood. This difference is in the expected direction, but is only slightly greater than zero (0.6 percent), and far too small to reach statistical significance. Likewise, correlational measures for ordinal data, such as Kendall's Tau-b, show nearly zero association between survey and audit.[12] Considering the possibility that our relatively small sample size

[11] The percentage of call-backs is lower than for the aggregate comparisons because of survey nonresponse. A full breakdown of survey responses (including all four survey response categories) by audit results is presented in Appendix B. Given the small sample sizes in this final comparison, a further breakdown by race of the tester would be impossible. Analyses, therefore, include all call-backs to testers in the criminal record condition regardless of race.

[12] The individual-level comparison further allows us to reconsider the practice of combining "very" and "somewhat" likely responses into a single category. To investigate this question, we recalculated Kendall's Tau-b between the audit call-backs and the vignette question using the four survey answers, with separate "very" and "somewhat" categories. Instead of producing stronger results, this coefficient is not statistically significant, and the negative sign is opposite that expected (Tau-b = –.0391).

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limits the reliability of these estimates, we calculate confidence intervals allowing us to assess the potential relationship that would obtain if we had used a larger sample. A 95 percent confidence interval for the difference in percentages includes a range from −8.6 to 8.8 percent, indicating that we are 95 percent confident that employers who indicate "yes" are no more than 8.8 percentage points more likely to make a call-back than employers who indicate "no."[13] A difference of 8.8 percentage points for making a call-back still is a fairly low level of correlational consistency.[14] We can thus be fairly confident that, given this pattern of results, even a much larger sample would be unlikely to produce a substantial relationship between survey and audit results.

These results cast strong doubt on the accuracy of survey data for indicating relative likelihoods of hiring. Individuals who report a higher likelihood of hiring an ex-offender are only trivially more likely to do so. Confirming the aggregate findings described earlier, the individual-level associations presented here appear to be no better at establishing a relationship between attitudes and behaviors.

Nevertheless, several limitations of this analysis must temper its conclusions. In the following discussion, we consider possible threats to the validity of our findings caused by measurement error or study design. In the first case, we consider the possibility for error in the survey or audit results, either of which could lead to a weakened correlation between the two.

In the case of the survey, the most plausible source of measurement error arises from those cases in which the survey respondent was different from the individual who reviewed the testers' applications. To the extent that hiring practices vary within firms depending on the individual manager or human resource officer, the consistency between survey and audit results will be attenuated. Although recent evidence suggests that labor market discrimination typically operates at the level of the firm rather than the level of individual discriminatory actors,[15] this possibility remains a potential source of measurement error. Nevertheless, although within-firm heterogeneity may indeed affect the individual-level consistency in measures of attitudes and behavior, there should be no effect on the average level of support for hiring ex-offenders in the aggregate (as presented in Figures 1 and 2). In cases wherein respondents differ, there is little reason to believe that the hiring agent would be systematically more or less likely to consider hiring ex-offenders than would the survey respondent.[16]

In the audit study, measurement error also may pose a problem. Because each employer was visited only once, we have only one data point with which to assess their hiring tendencies. Given the many factors at play in any given hiring situation (e.g., the urgency with which the position must be filled, the number and quali-

[13] This confidence interval is calculated using the "plus 4" method of Agresti and Caffo (2000). The Agresti and Caffo method has the advantage of providing accurate (and slightly conservative) intervals even when the count of successes or failures is very small. By contrast, the methods in standard introductory statistics books usually require at least five successes and failures for each group.

[14] Similarly, the upper limit of the 95 percent confidence interval for Kendall's Tau-b suggests that the degree of correlational consistency in a large sample probably would be quite low (below .167). The confidence interval for Kendall's Tau-b is asymptotic, and thus should be regarded with more caution than the confidence interval for the proportion, which is computed by a method with good small-sample properties.

[15] Recent studies have found that firm-level variables such as the presence of a human resource apparatus, the use of applicant tests, and affirmative action policies have far more influence on the racial composition of a company than the individual characteristics of hiring managers or owners (Holzer 1996; Holzer and Neumark 2000).

[16] One might also question whether possible changes in the economic climate at the time of each measurement may be responsible for some of the disparity. The unemployment rate in Milwaukee averaged 4.8 percent during the time of the audit, whereas in the 2 months during which the survey was administered, it had risen to nearly 6 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2002). Given that employers' openness to less desirable workers increases in the context of tight labor markets (Freeman and Rodgers 1999), we would rather expect more favorable responses from employers during the period of the audit study relative to the period of survey data collection.

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ty of other applicants), any single data point representing an employer's treatment of an ex-offender may be subject to the measurement error of circumstance.[17] Nevertheless, the almost complete absence of association between survey and audit measures leads us to question random error as a sufficient explanation. If the hiring process tends to be so complex as to defy any straightforward relationship between the abstract intentions of employers and their ultimate decisions, this would imply more than a simple problem of measurement. Indeed, we later discuss the complexity of hiring decisions as one of our hypothesized explanations for the discrepancy between outcomes.

More systematic forms of error can creep into an audit design if the experimental procedures are somehow compromised. Of primary concern are the potential biases that can be caused by the performance of testers, either because of poor matching or because of testers' self-fulfilling expectations (Heckman and Seligman 1993). Fortunately, a rather direct test of this hypothesis is possible. One would expect that if differences in testers' personalities or behavior shaped the outcomes (above and beyond any effects of race or criminal condition), we should see stronger results among those cases in which the testers had the opportunity to interact with employers. Applications submitted with little or no personal contact should be far less affected by such concerns. Analyzing the outcomes for these two kinds of tests, we find no evidence of tester bias. In fact, the main effects of both race and criminal background are substantially attenuated among those who did have personal contact with the employer (Pager 2003). This suggests that instead of exaggerating negative stereotypes, the appealing characteristics of these testers actually worked to reduce the measured effects, thus biasing the results in a direction consistent with the survey responses. It is unlikely then that these various sources of error can account for the significant disconnect between the survey and audit results.

A final limitation of the comparison provided earlier is its reliance on a single survey item. Flaws in the survey design or peculiarities of the question wording could lead to anomalous patterns of responses. Fortunately, an additional item was included in the survey that allows for similar comparisons to be drawn. Whereas the vignette most strongly paralleled the audit situation—including a match of the applicant's race—the second item also probed employers' willingness to consider hiring ex-offenders, in this case focusing on a generic applicant with a criminal record. The exact wording of this item was "Next, I am going to list several types of applicants. Please tell me if you would accept each type for the [most recent noncollege] position . . . an applicant who has a criminal record?" As described earlier, we compare those who answered that they "definitely" or "probably" will hire with those who answered "definitely" or "probably" not in relation to the audit outcomes.[18] The correlation between this measure and the audit results is again very small. The correlation coefficient from Kendall's Tau-b is .0003 (95 percent confidence interval, −.154 to .155). Again, our tests for significance in this case cannot reject the hypothesis of no relationship.

The various aforementioned limitations must certainly temper our conclusions. Nevertheless, the almost total lack of correlation between the survey and audit results is troubling. If these findings are an accurate assessment of the level of consistency for these and related measures, then studies that use similar survey items to draw conclusions about characteristics or circumstances associated with discrimination may come to strongly misleading conclusions.

On the basis of several methods for assessing the attitude–behavior relationship, all comparisons tell a similar story: it is difficult to get

[17] As in the case of the survey, measurement error in the audit results will attenuate individual-level associations, as presented in Table 2, but should not affect the aggregate comparisons presented in Figures 1 and 2.

[18] In the original survey, 25 percent of the respondents gave the response "it depends." As a conservative estimate, these respondents were treated as "willing to hire," producing a stronger correlation than when they are excluded from the analysis. In fact, the association of survey and audit becomes slightly negative when this category is excluded. (By contrast, the correlation coefficient from Kendall's Tau-b for this survey item and the original vignette item was .55).

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an accurate picture of actual hiring outcomes based on responses to the employer survey used in this study. Employers generally express a greater likelihood of hiring applicants with criminal records, and a far greater likelihood in the case of black applicants, than we see in actuality. Furthermore, employers who indicate greater willingness to hire an ex-offender in response to a survey question seem to be only slightly more likely actually to offer an interview to such an applicant. Both in terms of making aggregate- and individual-level predictions, our evidence points to weak correspondence between survey results and actual hiring outcomes.

ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS: WHY DO THEY DIFFER?

Why might employers' survey responses present results so discrepant from their actual behavior? Several theoretical explanations could be used to account for this incongruity. In this section, we provide a discussion of these explanations, considering the range of underlying processes that may give rise to differing outcomes.

Social Desirability And Compensatory Estimation

As discussed earlier, efforts to measure attitudes about sensitive topics are complicated by the problems of social desirability bias. According to this perspective, respondents may conceal their true feelings about blacks or ex-offenders in answering survey questions. If this is the case, the discrepancy between self-reports and behaviors should be viewed as the difference between false and true measures of a respondent's attitudes. Although social desirability pressures certainly result in some distortion of survey results, we do not believe that this can account fully for the differences between expressed willingness to hire ex-offenders and the actual employment outcomes based on applicants' criminal record. In fact, at other points in the survey, respondents expressed strong opposition to considering applicants with criminal records other than drug felonies: nearly 70 percent of employers expressed an unwillingness to hire an applicant who had been convicted of a property crime, and more than 75 percent were self-described as unwilling to hire an applicant who had been convicted of a violent crime (Pager, 2002; see also Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll 2003).[19] It therefore seems unlikely that social (or legal) pressures to accept ex-offenders whitewashed employer responses. High levels of acceptance were reported only for the applicant described as a drug felon.

Social desirability bias may be a greater concern in the measurement of racial preferences from the survey results, which is where we find the largest disparities between expressed attitudes and observed behaviors. To preempt this concern in the current study, we used a split-ballot format in which each employer responded to only one hypothetical (black or white) candidate. It remains possible, however, that social desirability bias is a problem if, even in the absence of direct comparisons by race, employers are aware that the race of the hypothetical applicant has been specified and therefore make conscious or unconscious efforts to compensate verbally for any negative reactions they may have to a black applicant. If respondents do in fact suppress negative reactions to race-specific targets, even when no racial comparison is provided, this calls into question the effectiveness of split-ballot survey designs as a strategy for measuring underlying racial prejudice. Any self-reported attitude toward a black target may in fact be distorted by the respondent's own compensatory estimation procedure.

Abstract Versus Specific Considerations

A second possible explanation for the discrepancy between measured attitudes and behaviors in this study relates to differences in the criteria used to evaluate a hypothetical versus an actual job candidate. It is plausible that the affirmative responses of employers considering the acceptability of a hypothetical applicant

[19] Questions about specific crime types followed the presentation of the initial vignette described earlier. Employers were asked to report the likelihood of hiring Chad if, instead of a drug crime, he had been convicted of a property crime, such as burglary, or of a violent crime, such as assault. Response categories for property/violent offenders were "very likely" (10/7 percent), "somewhat likely" (21/17 percent), "somewhat unlikely" (32/29 percent), and "very unlikely" (37/47 percent).

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indicate their genuine willingness to consider hiring an applicant with a criminal record *in the abstract*. In these general terms, apart from the minority of employers who categorically reject all applicants with criminal records, a prior conviction is not typically grounds for immediate disqualification. Rather, if the applicant's overall characteristics exceed a minimum threshold of employability, the respondent is likely to indicate a willingness to hire.

By contrast, in actual employment situations, the applicant's characteristics are judged not only according to some minimum threshold, but also relative to the pool of available applicants, and to the specific requirements of a job. In this case, many more contingencies are at play, and the presence of a criminal record may become a salient criterion by which to weed out less-qualified applicants.[20] Even if the employer genuinely believes that she or he would hire the applicant described in the abstract vignette, when confronted with the situation in real life, the contingencies of the hiring process may render hypothetical scenarios irrelevant.

Recognizing this potential disconnect, we made efforts to calibrate the behavioral responses to a concrete indicator of employability at that place and time. In this case, the white nonoffender, our baseline in Figure 2, serves this function by providing assurance that this level of qualification was sufficient to elicit a callback during that particular hiring process. Despite this adjustment, the willingness to hire expressed in the survey appears to be much higher than in the audit.

Even if differences between the exact vignette and the audit situations can explain some of the discrepancies between survey and audit measures of overall willingness to hire, this explanation cannot account for the considerable difference in race effects detected by these comparisons. In the survey, black and white applicants appear equally likely to receive offers, whereas in the audit, there is a large gap in favor of white applicants. An investigator using these survey data alone would be strongly misled about the role of race in shaping actual hiring decisions.

The Intensity Of Priming

A third perspective on the discrepancy between self-reports and behaviors proposes that the priming of characteristics during a phone interview may not elicit the same intensity of response as the in-person presentation of the same characteristics. Hearing a description of a hypothetical black ex-offender is quite different from seeing a young black man approach one's business in search of employment. The live interaction may trigger feelings of fear, anxiety, or threat in ways that a recited vignette does not (Poskocil 1977). These feelings may then influence employment decisions in ways that cannot be fully replicated in hypothetical scenarios in surveys.

Similarly, social psychological evidence suggests that racial stereotypes exert many of their effects indirectly, by coloring the evaluation of ambiguous information (Darley and Gross 1983). When employers are evaluating applicants, for example, an energetic, outgoing, young white applicant may be viewed as motivated and eager to work, whereas a similarly energetic, outgoing, young black male may be seen as a hustler or a "player." Even relatively straightforward cues can be interpreted in vastly different ways, depending on the context of the situation or the characteristics of the actor (Sagar and Schofield 1980). Again, these sorts of distortions would most likely operate during in-person evaluations. The vignette, by contrast, leaves less room for distorted interpretations, because according to the explicit description, the hypothetical candidate "has good references and interacts well with people." This class of explanations suggests that discriminatory behavior in the employment of ex-offenders, especially African-Americans, may have a basis in sources other than consciously believed attitudes toward these groups.

[20] Indeed, in response to the second more general survey question discussed earlier, when employers were asked about their willingness to hire a generic applicant with a criminal record (with no additional information provided), a large fraction of employers refused the forced-choice response categories, insisting instead that "it depends"—on the crime, on the length of time since the conviction, on the type of job, and numerous other considerations. In this case, then, the employers themselves acknowledged that any estimation given in the abstract would have very little bearing on how they might respond in making an actual hiring decision.

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In the article discussed earlier, LaPiere (1934) reinforces the view that surveys may elicit a different set of considerations than do concrete experiences. According to LaPiere, survey responses constitute "verbalized reaction[s] to a symbolic situation," or reactions to a highly abstracted representation of reality (p. 231). According to this viewpoint, survey responses do tell us something meaningful about the attitudes of respondents, but we have no way of anticipating the degree to which these expressed attitudes will be reflected in any particular set of behaviors. Certainly, it is difficult to anticipate how any individual, including oneself, may react to a situation previously encountered only in hypothetical terms. In the case of hiring decisions about individuals with stigmatizing characteristics, our results suggest that very little can be implied from these self-reports of employers for the accurate prediction of employment outcomes.

It is not possible using the current data to demonstrate conclusively which underlying process may have generated the observed discrepancies. In fact, it is highly plausible that more than one process may have been at work simultaneously. What these results do demonstrate, however, is that employers' expressed willingness in the survey taps into a set of processes very different from those measured through our behavioral study. Although these processes may be related to a common underlying disposition, the correspondence between the two can be quite weak. It is important that researchers recognize these limitations before drawing inferences about behavior from the self-reports of survey respondents.

Rethinking the Role of Attitudes

What can we conclude from these results regarding the usefulness of data on attitudes? Should we disregard all employers' self-reports? Certainly, it would be premature to advise such a radical stance. In fact, despite the large discrepancies between the self-reports and behaviors measured in the current study, we believe that survey results remain useful, even if they cannot be viewed as an alternative procedure to the measurement of actual discrimination.

Even in cases in which expressed attitudes have little relationship to measured discrimination, survey data can nevertheless tell us something useful about how employers *think* about important hiring issues. Responses to the survey suggest, for instance, that many employers who discriminate against blacks do not necessarily do so because of a principled belief that black employees should not be hired. In fact, we think it likely that many employers genuinely believe their own responses to surveys, professing the value of equal opportunity, while simultaneously justifying their behavior in hiring situations on grounds other than race (e.g., assumptions about the family/social/educational backgrounds of black applicants; see Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991). In this case, the difference between employers' self-reports and their actual behavior represents a meaningful discrepancy between two legitimate realities. The resolution of these differences represents an important focus of sociological investigation in its own right. Although low correlations between attitudes and associated behaviors often are viewed as a purely methodological test of survey questions, in many cases, these discrepancies actually may provide clues toward a better substantive understanding of the cognitive-emotional basis for action.

Furthermore, it remains possible that survey research may provide a better proxy for behavior in situations that are less complex and subject to fewer contextual influences than hiring. Action in any real social situation is the result of many factors other than the actor's attitude toward the object, including norms, perceived consequences of the action, and implicit or unconscious attitudes toward the object. The many complex influences on hiring decisions make these situations exactly the sort for which survey measures are least likely to be an effective substitute. Indeed, the three "classic" studies that found very weak associations between expressed behavioral intentions and behaviors all were studies of discrimination in social situations (Kutner et al. 1952; LaPiere 1934; Saenger and Gilbert 1950). We believe it possible that survey responses may provide a much more effective proxy for behavior in other contexts, such as those that involve voting (Traugott and Katosh 1979), signing of a petition (Brannon et al. 1973), or patterns of consumer behavior (Day et al. 1991), in which the link between behavioral intentions and actual behavior is less subject to contextual influences apart from the respondent's attitude or intention.

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Finally, we have focused on only a few of the many survey techniques that have been developed to measure prejudice and discrimination. Though our measure of behavioral intentions was designed to offer the closest match to the audit context, it remains possible that other more abstracted measures of racial bias may in fact correlate more closely with measures of discrimination. There is an extensive literature that attempts to investigate modern or subtle forms of racial attitudes using survey questions (National Research Council 2004, chapter 8), and certain of these alternative approaches could prove more effective at capturing behavioral outcomes than what we found in this study.

Three sociological approaches that we believe to be especially promising place their respective emphasis on stereotype measurement, past behavior, and in-depth interviews. The first of these, group stereotype measurement, has a long history in the social sciences, with research demonstrating a persistence of racialized attributions across numerous dimensions (Devine and Elliot 1995). As a recent example, researchers have developed a series of scales measuring respondents' images of different racial groups along a wide range of social and psychological characteristics (Bobo and Kluegel 1997; Smith 1991). Survey techniques such as these have shown respondents to rate blacks as worse or inferior relative to other groups on dimensions such as criminality and intelligence, suggesting that traditional measures of racial attitudes may be missing a great deal of underlying racial bias.

A second approach, used extensively by Harry Holzer and colleagues, asks employers to focus on the last worker hired, thereby grounding responses in a concrete recent experience (Holzer 1996; Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll 2003). By focusing on a completed action, Holzer is able to avoid the ambiguities of hypotheticals or general statements; and by focusing on actual outcomes, he is able to document "revealed preferences" rather than expressed ones. Likewise, Holzer's format calls for race to be assessed only as one incidental characteristic in a larger series of questions concerning the recent employee, thereby reducing the social desirability bias often triggered when the subject of race is highlighted. Whereas recall or motivational biases emerge as concerns in the reporting of prior experiences (Bradburn, Rips, and Shevell 1987), this particular approach focuses on a well-defined event that leaves less room for error-prone estimation.

Finally, some data suggest that in-depth in-person interviews may be more effective in eliciting candid discussions about sensitive hiring issues than other modes of interviews (Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991; Moss and Tilly 2003; Wilson 1996). In-depth interviews offer the opportunity for respondents to discuss the complexities and, at times, the inconsistencies in their views of various groups, thereby going beyond the more generalized assessments expressed in traditional survey items. Likewise, the opportunity for rapport-building in the in-person interview context may reduce social desirability pressures, making respondents feel at greater ease in expressing counter-normative beliefs.[21]

Although each of these represents a promising approach, our results caution against the unreflective assumption that the results of any method are necessarily good proxies for behavior. None of these techniques has yet been subjected to direct assessments by comparison of their responses with corresponding behavioral measures, a step we view as necessary for understanding the relation of these measures to behavioral outcomes. LaPiere's (1934) warning, that hypothetical scenarios often cannot convey the experience of concrete situations, deserves to be taken more seriously by current generations of survey and interview researchers.

CONCLUSION

LaPiere (1934) showed a striking inconsistency in the way hotel and restaurant proprietors reacted to Chinese customers in person, as compared with how they responded in surveys. The current study notes a similar discrepancy between employers' self-reported likelihood of hiring a particular applicant and their actual hiring behaviors when faced with a nearly identical candidate. We found an especially large and robust disparity between the reported likelihood of employers hiring black ex-offenders and actual rates of hiring. The low correlation between expressed and observed hiring out-

[21] For a critique, see National Research Council (2004), p. 175.

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comes presents an epistemological worry: our assessments of the degree of disadvantage faced by black ex-offenders would be substantially underestimated on the basis of the survey results alone. Moreover, we found little correlation between greater expressed likelihood of hiring ex-offenders in the survey and actual increased rates of call-backs for ex-offenders in real hiring situations. Given that most research on hiring preferences and practices comes from the self-reports of employers themselves (Downing 1984; Holzer 1996; Husley 1990; Jensen and Giegold 1976; Waldinger and Lichter 2003; Wilson 1996), these results indeed have serious implications.

In terms of the methods used to measure discrimination, these findings suggest that sociologists may need to reevaluate what is learned from studies that use vignettes of hypothetical situations to study behaviors toward stigmatized groups. Although we believe that these vignette studies often do tell us about respondents' abstract beliefs, in some cases these beliefs may have relatively little influence on the behavior of interest. Feelings and evaluations in a concrete social situation may be very different from those in the abstracted situation of the survey, but the two often are treated as nearly identical. An important next step in evaluating the contribution of survey measures for understanding behaviors of interest is to relate these items to actual behavior.

More broadly, these results suggest the limits of survey questions alone for understanding the changing nature of racial inequality. Survey questions indicating a liberalizing of racial attitudes among white Americans have been cited widely as evidence supporting the declining significance of race in American society. But if the items analyzed in this study have any bearing on survey responses more generally, we have reason to question that changing public opinion on matters of race has any necessary correspondence to the incidence of discrimination. Rather, our results support the perspective that there has been a growing gap between the principled statements and beliefs of white Americans in favor of racial equality and their concrete actions.[22] Survey questions provide one important perspective on American race relations, but they must be combined with other information for a complete picture.

Fortunately, methods to improve our understanding of the prejudice–discrimination relationship are readily available and feasible for even small groups of researchers. The comparison of survey measures and behavioral indicators does not require an unprecedented level of resources. Even for pedagogical purposes, sociology teachers could readily incorporate the dual design within a two-semester timetable. Whereas audit studies of labor markets can be quite involved, numerous other everyday social settings provide countless opportunities for implementing small-scale experiments: searching for an apartment, shopping, hailing a taxi, passing security checkpoints, and the like (for an example of a classroom application of the audit methodology, see Massey and Lundy 2001). Moreover, the investigation of prejudice and discrimination could be usefully applied to many other groups: Asians, Latinos, Muslims, women with criminal records, gays and lesbians, to name just a few.

For creative sociology teachers, then, a single class could readily achieve a paired audit study and telephone survey with sufficient sample sizes for meaningful comparisons. Both substantively and methodologically, the pairing of survey and audit research can yield important insights for the study of contemporary discrimination.

It is not the case that employers' thoughts and beliefs can tell us nothing about important employment issues. In fact, in many cases, surveys and other methods of eliciting employer opinions can provide useful information about attitudes and beliefs. In other cases, surveys may provide a very close reflection of actual employer behaviors. What this research emphasizes, however, is the importance of testing one's assumptions and providing external validation of key results. In the case of employers' behavior with respect to hiring black ex-offenders, the survey results presented here are far off base. The correspondence between self-reports and

[22] This perspective has also found support from certain well-designed surveys that manage to capture respondents' contradictory or competing beliefs (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Kinder and Sears 1981).

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behaviors with respect to other important hiring outcomes has yet to be established.

Devah Pager *is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Princeton University. Her research focuses on institutions affecting racial stratification, including education, labor markets, and the criminal justice system. Continuing her work using experimental field methods, she currently is investigating discrimination in low-wage labor markets in New York City (with Bruce Western). Her recent publications include "The Mark of a Criminal Record," published in the American Journal of Sociology (March 2003), and "The Structure of Disadvantage: Individual and Occupational Determinants of the Black–White Wage Gap," published in the American Sociological Review (August 2001) (coauthored with Eric Grodsky).*

Lincoln Quillian *is Associate Professor of Sociology at Northwestern University and the University of Wisconsin–Madison. His research focuses on inequality, racial attitudes, and urban population distribution. His current research projects include studies investigating the role of stereotypically biased evaluations in the creation of racial inequality and the consequences of spatial income segregation for social stratification.*

APPENDIX A

Survey Design and Implementation

The baseline survey instrument was developed by Harry Holzer and his colleagues.[23] It includes questions about the company such as size, industry, employee turnover, and racial composition; questions about hiring procedures such as the use of interviews, personality or aptitude tests, and background checks; questions about the last worker hired for a position not requiring a college degree including age, race, and sex of the worker, recruitment method, wage, and promotion opportunities; and questions concerning the employer's attitudes about various kinds of applicants including welfare recipients, applicants with long spells out of the labor market, unstable work histories, or criminal records. In addition, several survey items were added to mirror the audit study more closely (as described earlier).

The survey was administered by the Michigan State Survey Center. The final survey sample included 199 respondents, representing a 58 percent response rate. Response rates were calculated according to the basic formula $(I + P)/(I + P + R)$, where I equals the number of completed interviews, P equals the number of partial interviews, and R represents the number of refused eligible numbers (Groves and Lyberg, 1988). Between the time of the audit and that of the survey, two companies had declared bankruptcy, and an additional two had nonfunctioning numbers. These firms were dropped from the survey sample and excluded from the denominator for calculations of response rates.

Typical response rates for academic telephone surveys range from 50 to 80 percent. The current survey falls toward the lower end of the range of acceptable response rates as the result of several possible factors. Response rates for surveys of top management and organizational representatives typically lag behind those of employees or the general population (Baruch 1999). Likewise, there has been increasing resistance of businesses to participation in surveys, given the proliferation of market research firms and academics seeking employer participation for the growing number of studies involving businesses (Remington 1992). There has been a notable downward trajectory in the response rates from business surveys over the past 25 years (Baruch 1999; Cox et al. 1995), with increasing numbers of refusals citing that participation was against company policy (Fenton-O'Creevy 1996, cited in Baruch 1999). Even among the general population, Curtin, Presser, and Singer (2000) reported that the number of calls required to complete an average interview and the proportion of interviews requiring refusal conversion doubled between 1979 and 1996. The inundation of telemarketers (and, to a lesser extent, survey research) matched by the technological advances of caller-ID and privacy managers has made it increasingly difficult to recruit survey respondents for academic research (Remington 1992).

To assess the possible bias that may result from selective participation, two comparison tests were made. The first test compared basic characteristics of employers who responded to

[23] The first version of this survey was developed for the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality Employer Survey (Holzer 1996). Holzer, Stoll, and Raphael (2002) later modified the initial instrument to focus more closely on applicants with criminal records. The instrument used for the current study was further modified to reflect the priorities of this research project.

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the survey with the characteristics of those eligible for participation but refused. On the basis of industry, location, and call-back rates, the two groups were very similar, although some differences in occupational distribution were apparent: employers for restaurant jobs were the most likely to respond to the survey, whereas employers for laborer or service positions were the least likely. This difference probably has to do with the accessibility of employers in locally run restaurants, as compared with those in decentralized factories, warehouses, or companies. In an effort to account for this overrepresentation, key outcomes are recalculated using weights to achieve the sample distribution of the audit study (available upon request). A reweighting of the survey sample to match the distribution of the audit sample produced only a slight change in the mean likelihood (from .62 to .60). It is unlikely, therefore, that differential response rates of employers across industries have any effect on the survey outcomes or on the differences between survey responses and observed behavior.

Even without these adjustments, however, the distribution of responses on key attitude items closely match that for a previous sample of Milwaukee employers. In a second test of sample bias, basic employer characteristics from the current sample were compared with an identical set of questions asked of a more representative sample of Milwaukee employers in 1999 (Holzer and Stoll 2001). Although the earlier Milwaukee survey included a broader geographic area and oversampled large firms, the general attitudes expressed by employers in both samples were strikingly similar (Table A1). The consistency of these findings provides some reassurance that the current sample can serve as a useful gauge for the priorities and concerns of employers in the broader Milwaukee metropolitan area.

Table A1. Comparison of Employer Attitudes and Characteristics across Two Milwaukee Surveys

Variable	Pager 2002	Holzer and Stoll 2001
Employees (n)	66.95	180.47
Vacancies (n)	4.48	7.79
Minority-owned Companies (%)	8.40	8.41
Unionized Employees (%)	9.30	15.19
Industry		
Manufacturing (%)	12.43	20.00
Retail trade (%)	49.72	21.00
Services (%)	21.47	39.00
Other industry (%)	16.38	20.00
Hire Welfare Recipient		
Definitely/probably would (%)	97.40	96.62
Definitely/probably not (%)	2.60	3.37
Hire Applicant with GED		
Definitely/probably would (%)	98.80	97.23
Definitely/probably not (%)	1.20	2.77
Hire Applicant with Criminal Record		
Definitely/probably would (%)	49.20	49.20
Definitely/probably not (%)	50.80	50.80
Hire Applicant Unemployed >1 year		
Definitely/probably would (%)	70.90	80.15
Definitely/probably not (%)	29.00	19.86
Hire Applicant with Unstable Work History		
Definitely/probably would (%)	60.50	67.49
Definitely/probably not (%)	39.50	32.51

Note: GED = General Education Diploma.

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APPENDIX B

Table B1. Comparison of Employers' Self-Reports and Behavioral Outcomes for Overlapping Sample

	Audit Results	
Survey Results	No Call-Back	Call-Back
Likely to Hire Drug Offender		
Very Unlikely	31 (96.9 %)	1 (3.1 %)
Somewhat Unlikely	25 (88.3 %)	3 (10.7 %)
Somewhat Likely	69 (93.2 %)	5 (6.8 %)
Very Likely	20 (90.9 %)	2 (9.1 %)

Note: N = 199 respondents. Data shown as number of respondents with percent in parentheses.

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