

Self-censorship in the Labor Market

The goal of this research project is to study self-censorship in the labor market. We use an experiment to both document discrimination and elicit a prior on the average discrimination jobseekers expect to face and how this can affect their job search behavior. We are interested in how self-image concerns and fear of discrimination can affect job search behavior.

Discriminations and category-based policies research group

Anne BORING



Head of Sciences Po's Women in Business Chair, Assistant Professor of Economics at Erasmus University Rotterdam, and a research associate at LIEPP, Sciences Po.

Katherine B. COFFMAN



Primaral Associate Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School.

Dylan GLOVER



Assistant Professor of Economics at INSEAD and research associate at LIEPP, Sciences Po.

Research assistants:

- María José GONZALEZ FUENTES
- Emma RONZETTI

Motivation

We are interested in eliciting a prior on the average **discrimination jobseekers expect to face** and how this can affect their job search behavior. We aim to document what stereotypes jobseekers have about themselves and what stereotypes they believe employers have. We are also interested in the **reaction that jobseekers have when they receive feedback** regarding a job application, as well as to what do they attribute this feedback.

More specifically, we are interested in examining **job seekers' beliefs regarding a rejection** of their job application, and how rejection makes them update their job search behavior. Indeed, job seekers often do not know why their application got rejected. They can therefore form beliefs about the reasons why they did not get an offer from a recruiter. Because **minority candidates** are more likely to be discriminated against on the labor market, they may believe that discrimination is a reason why they do not get a job offer. This belief may impact their job search behavior.

Research Questions

- Are job seekers not applying to some jobs because they believe that recruiters discriminate against them?
- Does attributing failure of finding a job to stereotypes help to protect self-image?
- Do these beliefs have an impact on individuals' job search efforts?

Context

Economists have studied candidates' beliefs and job search behavior. Using a series of controlled experiments, Coffman et al. (2022) studied **gender differences in willingness to apply** and found that ambiguity regarding the qualifications required for a position can affect jobseekers' beliefs about their own chances and their decisions to apply, in particular for women. Exley and Kessler (2022) found large gender gaps in self-promotion, reflecting an **underlying gender gap in how individuals subjectively evaluate their performance**, in particular on male-typed tasks. In the same line, Coffman and Klinowski (2022) conducted two experiments to elicit participants' demand for feedback on their own performance on a task. The authors found no gender differences in preferences for feedback, despite **gender differences in beliefs about their own performance**.

Sample

We will recruit participants on Prolific. They must be aged 18+, located in the United States, and have at least 100 completed studies on Prolific with an approval rate of 95% or higher. We expect our sample, while not representative, to have **diversity in terms of age, sex, and socioeconomic status**.

We aim to recruit 1,000 individuals for our sample of recruiters and 2,000 individuals for our sample of job seekers. Because we are interested in discrimination, we plan to recruit a balanced sample in terms of white and minority participants among our candidate pool. Our samples of participants will be randomly assigned to a "blinded resume" or "non blinded resume" condition.

We will ask job seekers to **complete a task with 10 questions** that might increase the expected discrimination of individuals from stigmatized groups.

Consider this block of code:

```
if (paygrade == 7)
  if (level >= 0 && level <= 8)
    salary *= 1.05;
  else
    salary *= 1.04;
else
  salary *= 1.06;
```

If paygrade == 8 and level == 6, which will be the output?

Design

While these effects might be difficult to isolate in the field, using a controlled experiment will allow us to focus on the role of expected discrimination on individuals' decisions to apply. Moreover, the controlled framework will also allow us to study how rejection affects individuals' beliefs and their job search behavior. We will use **price lists** as our main instrument: they will allow us to elicit the willingness to hire or apply.

Employers

Each employer will receive 10 resumes randomly drawn from the sub-sample of resumes in their condition. Comparing the average willingness to hire two identical profiles between "blinded" and "non blinded" recruiters will allow us to measure **the average bias against minorities**.

HIRE THE CANDIDATE	DO NOT HIRE
50 CENTS FOR EACH QUESTION ANSWERED CORRECTLY	50 CENTS TOTAL
50 CENTS FOR EACH QUESTION ANSWERED CORRECTLY	100 CENTS TOTAL
50 CENTS FOR EACH QUESTION ANSWERED CORRECTLY	150 CENTS TOTAL

We will directly ask recruiters their beliefs on the total score of each participant to measure the accuracy of their beliefs on individuals' performance.

Job seekers

Job seekers will fill three price lists:

- The first one will allow us to measure their initial willingness to apply to a job offer after completing the task. Comparing willingness to apply between "blinded" and "non-blinded" will give us the **average bias individuals expect to face**.
- The second price list will allow us to measure the **immediate effect of a rejection** on an individual's willingness to apply.
- Finally, the third price list will allow us to measure the **change in willingness to apply** when individuals can hide/show their personal information.

APPLY	DO NOT APPLY
EXTRA 100 CENTS PER CORRECT ANSWER ON THE TECHNICAL TEST ONLY IF YOU ARE HIRED	EXTRA 5 CENTS TOTAL FOR SURE
EXTRA 100 CENTS PER CORRECT ANSWER ON THE TECHNICAL TEST ONLY IF YOU ARE HIRED	EXTRA 10 CENTS TOTAL FOR SURE
EXTRA 100 CENTS PER CORRECT ANSWER ON THE TECHNICAL TEST ONLY IF YOU ARE HIRED	EXTRA 15 CENTS TOTAL FOR SURE

After filling the first price list, with 95% probability job seekers will be **randomly matched to an employer that evaluated their resume** and with 5% probability, we will randomly draw a row from the price list and implement the participant's choice. If the participant decided to apply in the selected line, we will match them with an employer as described before.

Moreover, using direct questions we will also collect measures of job seekers' beliefs about:

- their performance on the task
- the likelihood to get hired
- to what do they attribute the rejection