

Even diversity-friendly employers discriminate against racial minority job seekers

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Sonia Kang is an Assistant Professor of Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource Management in the Department of Management at the University of Toronto Mississauga, and holds a cross-appointment to the Organizational Behaviour and HR Management area at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management. Credit: University of Toronto

Minority applicants may fare even worse in the resume pile at companies purporting to support diversity than they would at companies that don't make the claim, shows a new study from the University of Toronto.

That's because [job seekers](#) are less likely to "whiten" their resumes by downplaying their racial identities when responding to pro-diversity job ads. The odds of getting a callback for an interview when resumes are not whitened are significantly worse, regardless of whether the company says it's a pro-diversity employer or not. On the other hand, hiding one's race by "whitening" was found to improve minorities' chances of landing an interview.

"It's really a wake-up call for organizations to do something to address this problem. Discrimination is still a reality," says Sonia Kang, lead author of "Whitened Resumes Race and Self-Presentation in the Labor Market."

The paper examined resume; whitening: changing or deleting aspects of one's resume; to conceal or downplay one's race. The researchers found that while some minority job seekers rejected this practice, roughly one-third of Asian and black job seekers in the study "whitened" their resumes by either altering their first name—sometimes substituting a middle name or initial, or something more "American-sounding"—or removing professional experiences and achievements related to their racial group, or both. Even if participants didn't personally engage in whitening, two-thirds knew of others who did.

Participants mentioned that one reason they would refrain from whitening is if an organization included a pro-diversity statement in their job ad, and a subsequent experiment confirmed that minority job seekers were half as likely to whiten their resumes when applying to an employer touting diversity values.

However, a final audit study found callbacks for interviews from employers that mentioned diversity in their job ads were just as low for unwhitened minority resumes as they were from any other employer. Whitened resumes were more than twice as likely to get a callback, regardless of whether or not an employer's job ad mentioned diversity.

Kang, an assistant professor of organizational behaviour and human resources management at the University of Toronto Mississauga, who is cross appointed to UofT's Rotman School of Management, conducted the research with fellow Rotman School professors Katherine DeCelles and Andras Tilcsik, and Sora Jun of Stanford University.

This is the first study to audit callback rates for whitened versus unwhitened resumes. It also takes a unique approach to analyzing employment discrimination, by examining the proactive behaviour of minority job seekers, rather than focusing solely on what employers are doing.

"It shows us that racial minorities aren't just passively receiving this discrimination," says Prof. Kang. "They're trying to do something about it."

Organizations that also want to do something about discrimination must go beyond simple statements about how they value diversity. "By creating a false sense of security, these statements merely provide an illusion of diversity that might end up making things worse for minority applicants", she added.

The study is forthcoming in *Administrative Science Quarterly* and is online at

<http://asq.sagepub.com/content/early/2016/03/09/0001839216639577>.

Provided by University of Toronto

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