

Giving Them an Edge?

The effects of work experience on the employment prospects of Latino young men

By Catherine Singley Harvey*

Currently 10.2 million jobseekers in the U.S. are competing for only four million job openings.¹ Young people face steeper competition than older workers because they generally have less work experience, a key component of human capital.² While formal education is the strongest predictor of employment, practitioners and researchers generally agree that early work experience offers young people vital skills that benefit them throughout their careers. Young adults between the ages of 16 and 30—popularly referred to as the “millennial generation”—face much higher unemployment rates than the overall workforce. While the nationwide shortage of job openings is the primary driver of elevated youth unemployment, young people are also at a competitive disadvantage in the labor market because they have less work experience. It is concerning, however, that Latino[†] young men, who tend to have more work experience than their peers, face higher rates of unemployment and underemployment than White young men.

This brief summarizes the results of NCLR’s quantitative analysis of the marginal effects of work experience on the employment prospects of millennials. It focuses on Latino young men, offering an overview of the structural barriers, an investigation of whether and to what extent additional work experience gives millennials a competitive edge in today’s hypercompetitive labor market, and recommendations to ensure that they fully leverage their work to maximize their potential in the labor market. In particular, this brief will examine the labor market outcomes of Latinos, the youngest and fastest-growing segment of the American labor force.

Background

The Great Recession exacerbated and prolonged the typically high unemployment rates for millennials—defined as individuals between the ages of 16 and 30 years old in 2012.³ While the national unemployment rate hovers around 6.5%, the unemployment rate for teenagers ages 16–19 is 20% and higher. The employment situation for millennials of color is especially troubling; unemployment rates for Blacks are nearly double those of Whites, a staggering 49% for Black men ages 16–19 and 42% for Black women ages 16–19 (see Table 1).

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† The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

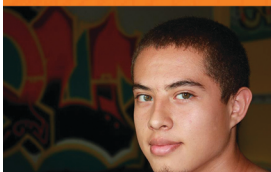


Table 1. Millennial Unemployment Rates by Age and Race/Ethnicity, 2012

Age	Latino		Black		White	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
16–19	34%	31%	49%	43%	24%	20%
20–25	15%	16%	29%	25%	13%	10%
26–30	10%	12%	21%	19%	8%	7%

Source: NCLR calculations based on 2012 American Community Survey, 1-year sample.

Unemployment is an imperfect measure of economic well-being because it fails to count workers who are not employed at their full potential or who are detached from the labor market but still able to work. It is useful, therefore, to measure *underemployment*, which includes individuals who are out of work, working part time but prefer full-time work, or gave up searching for a job but are still available to work. Underemployment paints a more vivid picture of the employment challenges that millennials, particularly millennials of color, currently face. For example, 41.9% of Latino millennials who lack a high school degree are underemployed (see Table 2).

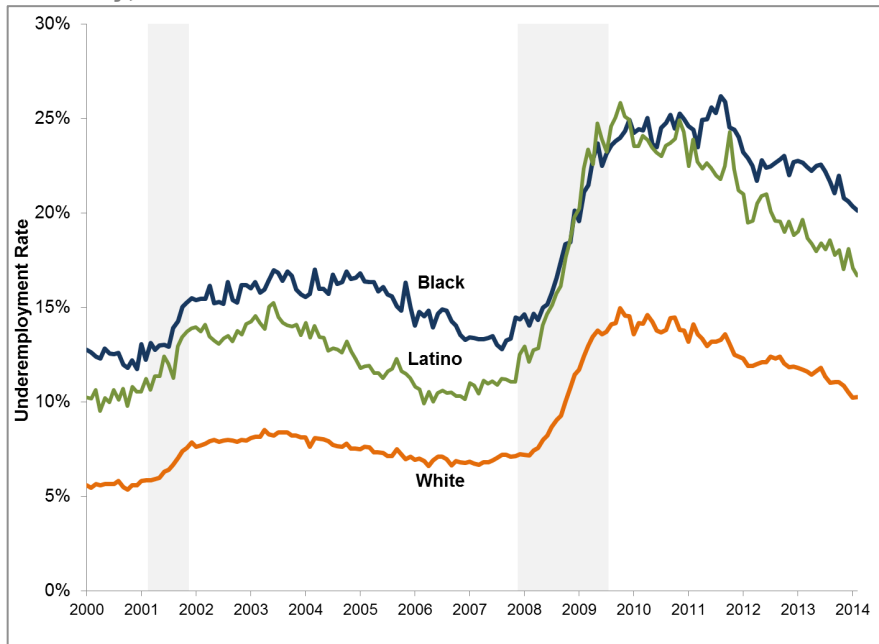
Table 2. Millennial Underemployment Rates by Age, Education, and Race/Ethnicity, 2014

Age and Educational Attainment	Latino	Black	White
Ages 17–20 with a high school degree only	41.9%	56.6%	36.8%
Ages 21–24 with a bachelor's degree	16.3%	25.5%	15.8%

Source: Economic Policy Institute unpublished analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Current Population Survey* monthly microdata, seasonally adjusted.

Latino underemployment levels track more closely with those of Blacks, especially during times of high unemployment (see Figure 1). The current underemployment rates for workers of all ages are 16.2% for Latinos, 20.5% for Blacks, and 9.9% for Whites. Latino underemployment is caused in large part by involuntary part-time work.⁴ Part-time work is less likely to offer some of the major components of a good-quality job, including higher wages, health and retirement plans, and paid leave.

Figure 1. Underemployment Rates of Workers Age 16 and Older by Race and Ethnicity, 2000–2014



Source: Economic Policy Institute, “Underemployment rate of workers age 16 and older by race and ethnicity, 2000-2014,” <http://stateofworkingamerica.org/charts/underemployment-by-race-and-ethnicity> (accessed June 2014).

The costs to society of high millennial unemployment are severe; a recent study by Young Invincibles and the Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce finds that current unemployment rates for 18- to 34-year-olds cost the federal and state governments almost \$8.9 billion each year, or about \$53 per taxpayer.⁵ The majority of the cost comes from the lost opportunity to collect tax revenue from working people, while safety net benefits for the unemployed account for the remainder.

The short- and long-term socioeconomic consequences of employment disparities among millennials of color have generated an urgent national conversation among young people, business leaders, the philanthropic sector, and government leaders. In recent years, advocates for young people have brought to light the barriers to success faced by “disconnected youth,” who are neither working nor enrolled in secondary or postsecondary education. Latinos are overrepresented among the disconnected youth population.⁶ In February 2014, President Obama announced a multistakeholder initiative called “My Brother’s Keeper” to collect solutions to improve life outcomes for boys and young men of color.

This national conversation is unfolding in the midst unprecedented economic challenges. Any efforts to tackle minority youth employment must confront the fact that the overall jobs shortage is the primary driver of unemployment. In addition, workers’ economic security has declined due to decades of major structural changes in the U.S. economy that diminished the quality of jobs.⁷ One estimate is that the share of workers with “good jobs,” defined as one that pays at least \$37,000 a year and provides health and retirement plans, dropped from 27.4% in 1979 to 24.6% in 2010.⁸ There is strong evidence to suggest that the recent recession accelerated that trend. According to the National Employment Law Project, lower-wage industries accounted for 44% of employment growth in the past four years.⁹ The rising share of part-time and temporary workers—a disproportionate share of whom is Latino—is a trend that has accelerated

since the recent recession, leaving many workers vulnerable to frequent bouts of unemployment.¹⁰

Definitions and Methodology

NCLR analyzed data from the 2012 American Community Survey to explore the marginal effects of work experience on employment outcomes for millennials by age, race, and ethnicity. Our analysis focused on the employment outcomes of the civilian labor force ages 16–30 years old. We divided workers into three age cohorts: 16–19, 20–25, and 26–30. These cohorts are designed to roughly capture workers of secondary education age, college age, and post-college age, respectively.

Holding education and other characteristics constant, we measured how much an additional year of work experience affected a worker's probability of being employed or unemployed and, if employed, whether the individual worked part time or full time. We use the U.S. Department of Labor's definition of full-time work to be individuals employed an average of 35 hours per week or more.

There are several limitations to our analysis that require careful consideration. We did not analyze the quality or duration of work experience, which could vary greatly among individuals.* In addition, the analysis is not broken down by occupation. We expect that there would be differences in the marginal benefits of work experience by occupation. This additional analysis merits investigation.

Findings

The perceived advantage of additional work experience in today's hypercompetitive job market is one that deserves exploration, especially considering that Latino young men tend to have more work experience compared to their peers. NCLR's analysis found significant differences between Latino males and their peers:

- Latino men in their twenties have the most work experience compared to their peers.
- Work experience boosts employment prospects for Latino young men. This is not the case for all millennials.
- Work experience makes no difference in the likelihood that Latino men in their late twenties will work full time, contrary to other millennials.

Latino men in their twenties have the most work experience compared to their peers. Among all millennials ages 16–19 in the labor force, Latino and Black males have the most average years of work experience: 0.63 years and 0.70 years, respectively. In their twenties, Latino males pull away from other groups. As Table 3 shows, Latino males ages 20–25 have an average of 4.3 years of work experience, accumulating an average of 10.1 years of experience in the 26–30 age group.

* For the purposes of NCLR's analysis, work experience is defined as age minus years of education minus 6, following the seminal work of Jacob Mincer (1958). For more details on NCLR's methodology, please contact the author.

Table 3. Average Work Experience in Years by Age and Race/Ethnicity, 2012

Age Range	Latino		Black		White	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
16–19	0.63	0.49	0.70	0.46	0.45	0.34
20–25	4.30	3.81	3.94	3.49	3.31	2.91
26–30	10.1	9.42	9.38	8.61	8.16	7.57

Source: NCLR calculations based on 2012 American Community Survey, 1-year sample.

Work experience boosts employment prospects for Latino young men. As expected, NCLR’s analysis shows that across all age groups, additional education contributes far more to the likelihood of employment than additional labor market experience. However, controlling for education, the extra boost, or “marginal benefit,” of work experience in determining whether millennials find work varies. Additional years of work experience give Latino male millennials a significant boost in employment. Results for other subgroups are mixed, with no detectable effects for women in their late twenties.

Among young men ages 16–19, Latinos are the only group for whom additional work experience significantly boosts the likelihood of employment (by 3%). In contrast, additional work experience lowers the likelihood of employment for White young men by 5% and has no measurable effect on the employment probability of Black young men. Among Black and White women ages 16–19, additional work experience has a slightly negative effect on the probability of employment (5% and 8%). For Latinas, the effect is statistically insignificant.

By the time workers are in their early twenties, additional work experience has a significantly positive marginal effect on employment for all groups, with the exception of Black women. The extra boost in employment due to work experience is double for Latino and Black men compared to their White peers.* In their later twenties, women and White men ages 26–30 see no significant boost in employment due to additional work experience. By contrast, the strength of work experience in predicting employment for Latino men ages 26–30 returns to the level it is at for Latino men ages 16–19: about 3% for each additional year of work experience. Black men ages 26–30 also experience a boost in employment as a result of additional experience, although less (0.7%) than that of Latinos.

Work experience makes no measurable difference in the likelihood that Latino men in their late twenties will work full time. According to NCLR’s analysis, while additional work experience improves the employment prospects for Latino young men, it does not necessarily make a difference in whether they work full time (more than 35 hours per week) or part time. Among millennials at the same level of education, additional work experience increases the likelihood of working full time for all groups—Latino, Black, White, male, and female—except for Latino males ages 26–30. For this cohort, additional work experience is insignificant in predicting the likelihood of full-time or part-time work.

* For Latino men ages 20–25, each additional year of work experience makes them 1.4% more likely to be employed. Notably, the magnitude of this effect for Latinos in their early twenties is about half of what it is for Latinos ages 16–19. Similarly, the boost to employment for Black men ages 20–25 is 1.5%. For White men ages 20–25 the effect is 0.6%.

Overall, working Latinos in their teenage years and early twenties are more likely than their female, White, and Black peers to be employed full time. Approximately 85% of employed Latino men ages 26–30 work full time, which is comparable to the share of White men ages 26–30 working full time. On the surface, these relatively high rates of full-time work among employed Latino male millennials should be reassuring. However, recall that involuntary part-time work—part-time employment of individuals who would rather be employed full time—is a major driver of Latino underemployment and leaves workers less economically secure.

Discussion

While individual life circumstances vary, NCLR’s findings paint a general picture of how Latino male millennials benefit differently from additional work experience than their peers. These disparities are likely the result of one or more structural issues that affect labor market outcomes for Latino young men.

Occupational clustering. The occupational distribution of Latino male millennials is likely a major factor in why additional work experience helps Latinos secure employment. Alonso-Villar et al. find that Latino men tend to experience a higher degree of occupational segregation than Latinas because they work in occupations with a high concentration of Latinos.¹¹ That is to say, Latino workers and new immigrants in particular are concentrated in specific sectors, or “clusters,” of the economy in which they compete for lower-wage jobs with similarly qualified Latinos (see Table 4 for examples). In occupations with a high Latino concentration, additional work experience may be more valuable for Latinos to distinguish themselves from their peers.

Table 4. Selected Occupations with High Latino Representation, 2013

Detailed occupation	Latinos as a percent of total employed	Employed Latinos (in thousands)
Drywall installers, ceiling tile installers, and tapers	55.1%	69
Pressers, textile, garment, and related materials	52.6%	29
Graders and sorters, agricultural products	47.0%	44
Grounds maintenance workers	44.8%	594
Laundry and dry-cleaning workers	42.5%	71
Dishwashers	37.9%	114
Hand packers and packagers	37.7%	186
Butchers and other meat, poultry, and fish processing workers	34.7%	112
Misc. media and communication workers	31.5%	28
Barbers	30.0%	38
Medical assistants	24.8%	114
Hand laborers and freight, stock, and material movers	23.1%	404
Dental assistants	22.9%	63
Cashiers	21.3%	693
Tax preparers	17.9%	17

Logisticians	17.2%	15
Teacher assistants	16.6%	152
Advertising and promotions managers	16.1%	8
All occupations	15.6%	22,453

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, Annual Average 2013,” *Current Population Survey*, <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.htm> (accessed June 4, 2014).

Social networks. Related to occupational clustering are the methods Latinos use to search for work. Research shows that Latinos are more likely than Blacks and Whites to rely on relatives and friends to find jobs, as opposed to marketing themselves through résumés, searching classified ads, or seeking assistance from labor intermediaries such as temp agencies and state employment agencies.¹² Other scholars have questioned whether this disparity is overstated by Latinos and underreported by Whites.¹³ Nevertheless, prior work experience may not be sufficient for a man in his late twenties to access a full-time job opportunity if the occupations in his network of friends and family are limited to part-time work or in limited occupational clusters. This hypothesis could explain NCLR’s finding that additional work experience makes no significant difference in the ability of older Latino male millennials to work full time.

Immigration status. The large share of foreign-born workers among Latino male millennials is likely a contributing factor to their higher average years of work experience. Foreign-born men are more likely to participate in the labor force than native-born men.¹⁴ Approximately 18% of Latinos ages 16–19, 31% of Latinos ages 20–25, and 46% of Latinos ages 26–30 are foreign-born.¹⁵ Assuming that a significant share of the 26–30 immigrant millennial cohort is undocumented, it is not surprising that additional work experience makes little difference in whether this cohort finds full-time employment. The sectors employing the largest shares of undocumented men—construction, retail, and other services—are more likely to offer part-time work.¹⁶

Hiring bias. How work experience factors into employers’ hiring decisions has major implications for the employment prospects of Latino male millennials. Employers’ explicit and subconscious beliefs of what constitutes the “right” kind of work experience may put some applicants at a disadvantage. For instance, does a dishwasher or a lifeguard have a better chance of snagging an entry-level job at a marketing firm? Furthermore, factors such as a tendency to avoid individual ownership for past accomplishments may somewhat diminish some Latinos’ ability to market their work experience effectively.¹⁷

Bias in how employers value work experience may compound the existing unconscious racial and ethnic biases that already affect Latinos and other minority job applicants. A number of recent studies document discrimination in the hiring process. A seminal study by Bertrand and Mullithan (2003) showed that Black applicants with similar education and skills were rejected for potential interviews based solely on having a Black-sounding name.¹⁸ A more recent study showed that Black and Latino applicants with clean backgrounds fared no better than White applicants with equal résumés but who were just released from prison. Latino millennials report differential treatment in the workplace.¹⁹ They perceive that an employer’s assumptions about their immigration status inhibit their work opportunities.²⁰

Recommendations

The clear benefits of additional work experience for Latino male millennials' employment call for enhanced efforts to expand job opportunities for young men. However, the fact that additional work experience alone is not sufficient to enable Latino men to break into full-time jobs requires a set of effective responses to address structural barriers. Young men cannot solve these challenges on their own; policymakers and businesses are among the many actors that have important roles to play. The following set of recommendations, by no means exhaustive, would ensure that more Latino male millennials are able to acquire and leverage early work experience for better employment outcomes.

Recommendations for federal policymakers

Create high-quality work experiences targeted toward Latino male millennials. As long as the severe jobs shortage persists, young people will be stymied in their efforts to gain valuable work experience. Building on past success, policymakers must pursue aggressive job creation strategies that open employment opportunities targeted toward youth. Federal funding for summer youth employment programs should be expanded and transformed into a year-round public commitment to guiding young people along career pathways. In order to address the challenge of occupational clustering and closed social networks, resources for youth employment programs should be prioritized for low-income Latino and recent immigrant communities. Community-based organizations, public schools, community colleges, and vocational education programs must coordinate with employers to provide programming customized to local economies and communities.

The age cutoff for youth-serving programs excludes a significant share of Latino men who still need employment and training services but may not be in a position to take advantage of programs targeted toward adults. Further research is needed to understand the unique assets and needs of Latino men in their late twenties and their engagement with federal employment interventions.

Incentivize the public education and workforce development systems to provide full-time jobs for Latino men in their late twenties. Given the evidence that job experience alone is not sufficient for Latino men to break in to full-time employment, it is essential that employment programs prioritize placement in full-time jobs while also providing training that enables young men to build the skills needed for full-time careers. Performance metrics should reward placing program participants in full-time, rather than part-time, jobs. Policymakers should also build on nascent efforts to grant local governments the flexibility to braid multiple public and private funding streams to craft employment and training programs that put younger workers on pathways to careers.

While this brief did not explore the unique employment challenges of the burgeoning population of Latino college students, the federal government should broaden opportunities for joint learning and high-quality paid work experience. Work-study programs, in which Latino students earn more on average than White or Black students, should rise proportionately with the cost of education.²¹ Policymakers should expand the award and eligibility requirements for Pell grants to ensure better college completion rates among Latinos. More research is necessary to document the challenges of Latino students who are working full time while enrolled in postsecondary education programs.

Enact comprehensive immigration reform that includes employment strategies for formerly undocumented young people. There is no question that a lack of work authorization relegates some young Latinos to a limited pool of low-wage jobs with little, if any, hope for career mobility. While an estimated 1.9 million young people could qualify for temporary work authorization through the Obama administration's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, there is initial evidence that the temporary status of DACA recipients remains a barrier to employment.²² Only comprehensive immigration reform that includes a pathway to citizenship will successfully ensure that workers are able to fully participate in the economy. The newly legalized young workers would be a boon to the economy, bringing their skills and talents to the labor market and generating up to \$5.4 billion more in tax revenue in just three years.²³

Lessons from 1986, the last major reform of the immigration system, point to the need for dedicated resources for integrating newly legalized immigrants into the labor market.²⁴ Such efforts should go beyond funding for English and civics education to more sophisticated vocational training and career pathways programs that target young people who grew up and were educated in the U.S. but may be entering the workplace for the first time. Coordinated education, training, and paid work experience for formerly undocumented young people is an essential component of a successful approach to integrating immigrant youth and their families into the economic mainstream.

Recommendations for businesses

Reexamine how work experience is valued in recruitment and hiring. While the wage premiums for college-educated workers are clear, projections show that not all full-time jobs of the future will require a four-year college degree. For example, management occupations that require an associate's degree are expected to grow by 12.5% by 2022, compared to 11.8% growth for management occupations that require a bachelor's degree.²⁵ Nevertheless, research shows that education is the strongest signal to employers about a candidate's abilities, despite the fact that education does not necessarily correspond with productivity.²⁶ Employers who seek to identify productive workers and diversify their hiring pool should consider ways to evaluate work experience as a qualification for employment.

Existing industry partnerships and associations are an appropriate forum for reconsidering the credentials and qualifications for entry-level jobs. Understandably, education will still be a prerequisite for many entry-level jobs. Still, businesses should consider ways to identify and measure "skills targets," such as collaboration, problem solving, and verbal communication, among job applicants.²⁷ Recent commitments by large corporations to hire war veterans may also offer important lessons on how abilities and skills from unrelated work experience are valued and transferable. Job descriptions should be revised to accurately reflect priority skills targets in order to recruit and hire a more diverse pool of qualified individuals.

Leverage people and technology to recruit and hire Latino male millennials. Most private sector employers understand the business case for hiring employees from diverse backgrounds. Employees of various gender, race, ethnicity, and cultural backgrounds breed innovation and help companies adapt to the demands of an ever more diverse customer base. Most major companies have a stated commitment to diversity; for some, this involves measurable goals and a strategy for recruiting, hiring, and retaining diverse employees. Within large companies, Latino employee resource groups (ERGs) are a common model to coordinate strategies to identify, develop, and

recruit talent from local Latino communities. These efforts range in scale from employee participation in community events to mentorship and coaching of young people to paid internships reserved for local youth of color.

While ERGs play an essential role in expanding the social networks of young Latino jobseekers, their impact is limited if they are not involved in the development and execution of a workforce diversity strategy. As representatives of underrepresented communities, ERGs should be consulted and involved in helping companies design their diversity strategy. The underrepresentation of Latinos among hiring managers is another major stumbling block for even the most well-intentioned companies pursuing their hiring goals. For this reason, diversity professionals emphasize not only the hiring of Latinos for entry-level jobs but also a commitment to retention and leadership development among Latino employees to position them to influence recruitment and hiring strategies.

Technology is critical to matching qualified Latino men with jobs outside traditional job clusters. A unified online portal that allows employers to upload job descriptions using a universal or industry-specific set of skills targets, discussed above, would facilitate the training, recruitment, and hiring of young people. Online job search companies are well positioned to convene a dialogue with businesses, young people, educational institutions, and nonprofit community-based organizations to build better tools to match jobseekers with employers. The online portal RallyPoint, which helps individuals transition from military service to the civilian workforce, is one such model that could be adapted to help jobseekers at the start of their careers leverage their earlier work experience.

Combat unconscious racial and ethnic bias in hiring. Discrimination in recruitment and hiring, whether conscious or unconscious, violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Oftentimes, however, unintentional employment discrimination stemming from implicit bias is difficult to identify. All individuals hold stereotypes, attitudes, and preferences that influence their decision making without their awareness. Employer attitudes about age, race, ethnicity, or nativity, among other characteristics, can unintentionally filter out qualified individuals from the hiring process. Fortunately, businesses have the power to mitigate bias in the recruitment and hiring process. Interventions that have proven successful include training in counter-stereotyping, building relationships with individuals, especially incumbent employees, outside the workplace, and educating hiring managers and staff about implicit bias.²⁸ Scholars debate whether it is possible to achieve absolute objectivity in hiring; however, businesses committed to minimizing unconscious bias could make a profound impact on the employment prospects of Latino male millennials.

Conclusion

The national conversation on improving outcomes for young men of color is urgently needed. By focusing on the structural barriers that inhibit Latino male millennials from reaching their full potential, policymakers and businesses can take the lead in ensuring that more Latino young men will successfully leverage their work experience for long-term career success.

Endnotes

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²⁵ Emily Richards and Dave Terkanian, "Occupational Employment Projections to 2022." U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Washington, DC, December 2013, http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2013/article/occupational-employment-projections-to-2022.htm#_ednref7 (accessed May 2014), Table 3.

²⁶ Michael Spence, "Job Market Signaling," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 87, no. 3 (1973): 355–374.

²⁷ MHA Labs, "MHA Labs," http://mhalabs.org/downloads/MHA_Overview.pdf (accessed May 2014).

²⁸ For a literature review on implicit bias, see Cheryl Staats, *Implicit Bias Review 2013*, (Columbus: The Ohio State University, 2013), kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/docs/SOTS-Implicit_Bias.pdf (accessed May 2014).

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