Rental Discrimination and Ethnicity in Names[1]

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Laboratory studies have demonstrated the ability of names to prime stereotypes. To apply these theories and test the effect of name-based ethnic stereotypes on housing discrimination, 1,115 inquiry e-mail messages were sent to landlords advertising apartment vacancies in Los Angeles County over 10 weeks (6 weeks before the conflict with Iraq began in March 2003 and 4 weeks during the conflict). One of three names that implied either Arab, African American, or White ethnicity was randomly assigned to each of the messages sent. African American and Arab names received significantly fewer positive responses than the White name, and the African American name fared worst of all. This pattern held true in all rent categories, in corporate and privately owned apartment complexes, and before and during the war in Iraq.

Rental Discrimination in Los Angeles: Perceptions of Ethnicity in Names

The Fair Housing Act of 1988 (FHA) prohibits housing discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, family status, and national origin. Yet housing discrimination remains widespread in the United States. In the mid-1990s, the Department of Housing and Urban Development estimated the number of incidents of housing discrimination based on race to be between 2 and 10 million a year (Feagin, 1999). In light of this, many government agencies, including the Department of Housing and Urban Development (DHUD), took steps to diminish racially discriminatory practices. For example, an aggressive campaign was begun to educate landlords regarding their responsibilities and to inform minorities of their rights.

As a result of these and other steps, there has been some progress in addressing the issues of egregious race discrimination in housing for minority home seekers (DHUD, 2002). However, other, subtler forms of discrimination have been largely overlooked by researchers and generally ignored by politicians and community activists. One such form of discrim-

ination is that which is based on national origin. Since September 11, 2001, incidents of harassment, assaults, and hate crimes against Arab Americans, Muslim Americans, and those perceived to be affiliated with these ethnic groups have been on the rise (DHUD, 2001). The war with Iraq and the continuous political turmoil in the Middle East further exacerbate negative perceptions of these groups. This overall sociopolitical climate is conducive to all forms of discrimination, including discrimination in housing based on names.

The FHA stipulates (in the provision against national origin discrimination) that it is illegal to discriminate based on an individual's culture, place of birth, language, or name. This study aims to assess whether landlords in Los Angeles County observe the antidiscrimination provision of the FHA with regard to name discrimination, and in particular whether or not landlords discriminate against people with Arab names. Cultural and semantic attributes associated with names have the potential to activate stereotypes, and thus we sought to address two questions: (a) Would a person with an Arab name be discriminated against just because of the name? (b) Is discrimination, if any, limited to Arab names, or does it extend to names associated with other minorities?

Activating Stereotypes

Two issues on which the findings of the studies of names agree are that (a) names are inherently stereotypical and (b) names elicit different treatment of individuals because of the associated expectation attached to them. ''The Pollyanna hypothesis'' is what Osgood (1964) named the universal predilection in human societies to define the experience of reality as more ''good, strong, and active'' than ''bad, weak, and passive.'' Does this optimism apply to everybody, regardless of sex, nationality, or religion, or is it more of an in-group behavior? Studies in social cognition suggest that, in fact, the ''good, strong, and active'' perceptions actually apply to in-group members, while ''bad, weak, and passive'' seem to be characteristics more often attributed to out-group members (Tajfel, 1970).

Stereotyping, or ordinary categorization, usually involves false assumptions that all group members share the same characteristics. These assumptions seem to be based, at least in part, on a collection of associations that link the group subjected to stereotyping to a set of descriptive characteristics (Devine, 1989). Tajfel (1969) argued that stereotypes are immediately followed by prejudice. Prejudice is treating people differently based on their group membership, and it seems to involve acting in some way upon stereotyping beliefs. Brigham (1971) argued that most people are characterized by either high or low levels of prejudice. He also suggested that both high- and

low-prejudice people are equally familiar with the cultural stereotype at hand, but only low-prejudice people inhibit the stereotyping thoughts (which are automatically activated) and replace them with thoughts of equality, reflective of a negation of the stereotype. It was not until 1989 that Devine proved that stereotypes are indeed known by both high- and low-prejudice people. Furthermore, Devine (1989) showed that stereotypes are automatically activated in the presence of a member, or some symbolic equivalent, of the stereotyped group. One particularly interesting aspect of Devine's study is the conclusion that most of us engage in stereotyping, and thus efforts should be directed towards finding out how low-prejudice-level individuals block stereotyping thoughts.

The Significance of Names

Commenting on the importance of names, Hertzler Bosmajian (1974) writes, "an individual has no definition, no validity for himself, without a name. His name is his badge of individuality, the means whereby he identifies himself and enters upon a truly subjective existence" (p. 3). In many instances, names are the earliest information available to people during social interaction. Sometimes we know individuals by their names before we even meet them in person. We often exchange names when we introduce ourselves to others, and as a result we alter our behavior either to avoid or to continue interacting with them (Erwin & Calev, 1993).

Names can usually tell us the sex of a person and, in some cases, the age of a person (Hargreaves, Colman, & Sluckin, 1983). Last names may disclose a person's religious affiliation, social position, ethnic background, and tribal affiliation (Daniel & Daniel, 1998; Dinur, Beir-Hallahmi, & Hofman, 1996). Young, Kennedy, Newhouse, Browne, and Thiessen (1993), commenting on the demographic information a name might disclose, noted that, for instance, "the name Bertha might be judged as belonging to an older Caucasian women of lower-middle class social status, with attitudes common to those of an older generation" (p. 1771).

The literature regarding the social psychological consequences of names can be classified in two categories: (a) studies that test for evaluations of performance by the name bearer and (b) studies that test for differences in attributions outside the control of the name bearer. The present study is concerned with the latter. Studies of the effect of names on performance evaluations have produced mixed results (Erwin, 1999; Erwin & Calev, 1984; Tompkins & Boor, 1980). Burning (1972) has suggested that unattractive names make the bearer a more noticeable and memorable person because they are uncommon within a culture. He also suggested that uncommon

names might encourage a drive in the bearer for uniqueness and a strong positive sense of self-esteem.

Thus, where matters of performance and skill (such as academic success) are concerned, unusual names or names that are associated with ethnic minorities may not be a consistent disadvantage. Our present concern is with a matter of resource allocation (leasing an apartment) that is not based on achievement. Discrimination may be more pronounced and negative in circumstances in which a person's qualities and traits cannot be deployed to counter potential stereotypes.

Similarly to other nonverbal communication, names convey impressions in subtle ways (Mehrabian, 1981). As a result, individuals may fail to recognize the subtle and persistent effects their names have on the way that others perceive them in various social or professional situations. A number of studies have investigated how names influence different forms of attribution such as physical attractiveness, intelligence, achievement, ethnicity, collective inclusion or exclusion, popularity, and competence (Daniel & Daniel, 1998; Dinur et al., 1996; Erwin, 1993; Hargreaves et al., 1983; Hassebrauck, 1988; Young et al., 1993). These studies suggest that first names elicit such distinct opinions about the bearer of the name that they become the primary basis for stereotyping. One recent study, particularly relevant to ours, links name-based stereotypes to discrimination in the labor market. Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) found that résumés containing White-sounding names elicit close to 50% more callbacks than equivalent résumés containing African-American-sounding names.

Deprived of the opportunity to demonstrate their determination to counter negative stereotypes associated with their names, people may find themselves discriminated against based on those stereotypes. Furthermore, such treatment may contribute to the formation of a self-fulfilling prophecy once individuals become aware of different treatment because of their name and its associated expectations (Erwin, 1995). Applicants making initial inquiries as to the availability of an apartment (the subject of the present study) may have their ethnicity, character, competence, and attractiveness evaluated before they ever meet their prospective landlord, and the results may be tangible in the loss of an opportunity to find suitable housing.

Housing Discrimination

DHUD has been conducting a study of discrimination in housing since 1989, the first phase of which ended in 2000. This DHUD study is one of a kind because it is the first time discrimination in housing based on race and ethnicity was measured in a federal government study.

Among other variables, two kinds of outcomes, *availability* and *encouragement*, are tracked by DHUD. Availability refers to whether a person is told that an advertised unit is available or not; discrimination occurs when, for example, a minority is told "sorry, we just rented the unit" while a White person is told "the unit is still available." Encouragement refers to whether the person responding to an ad is invited to see the unit; also counted as "encouragement" is a real estate agent's willingness to help a person with application procedures. The data suggest that between 1989 and 2000, housing discrimination against those seeking to rent a unit decreased 18% for African Americans but was unchanged for Hispanics. Some types of discrimination towards minorities were more prevalent than others, depending on the kind of transaction and the ethnicity of the person trying to rent. For instance, housing availability and encouragement were down 22% for Blacks and 26% for Hispanics (DHUD, 2002).

The current study builds upon existing knowledge and attempts to test whether there is discrimination in housing based solely on exposure to an individual's name. This study is novel because of its intent to examine name-stereotyping research in actual practice, applying theories of name-based attribution to the problem of housing discrimination. Given the rise in discrimination against Arab-appearing people in the United States, we hypothesize that an Arab name will provoke higher levels of discrimination in housing than an African American name. Using DHUD's concept of availability, plus a more general indicator of willingness to engage with an inquiry from a potential tenant, we proposed the following hypotheses:

> *Hypothesis 1*: Landlords will answer an inquiry from a person with a White-sounding name disproportionately more often than from people whose names are associated with other ethnicities.

> *Hypothesis 2*: Apartments will be described as available disproportionately more often to an applicant with a White-sounding name than to applicants whose names are associated with other ethnicities.

> *Hypothesis 3*: Landlords will answer an inquiry from a person with an African-American-sounding name disproportionately more often than from a person with an Arab-sounding name.

> *Hypothesis 4*: Apartments will be described as available disproportionately more often to an applicant with an African-American-sounding name than to an applicant with an Arab-sounding name.

There is reason to believe that not all landlords will discriminate equally or in the same way. Apartments differ in the nature of their ownership and management. Apartments that are part of large complexes managed by a professional staff and owned by a corporation differ from those owned and managed by a private individual who lives in the complex or nearby. We hypothesized that corporate-owned apartments may be less likely to discriminate because their staff may be better trained to take steps to avoid lawsuits. Private landlords may have fewer resources to spend on getting up-to-date legal advice and training. Private landlords may also feel more free to make decisions according to their personal prejudices than members of a professional staff who are acting as representatives of a company.

> *Hypothesis 5*: Private landlords will discriminate on the basis of names more often than corporate landlords.

The monthly rent charged for a particular apartment may also make a difference in the discrimination landlords demonstrate. Apartments with relatively low rents are in high demand in Los Angeles, and this may allow landlords to be selective according to whatever filters they choose to employ. However, if (as has been demonstrated by DHUD) unlawful discrimination has pushed non-White ethnic groups out of the market for higher-priced apartments, the landlords for more affordable apartments may have found them to be dependable tenants and opened doors to them. Apartments in the highest rental categories may also be in high demand (signified by the rent the landlord is able to charge for them) but are also the most likely to be professionally managed. In the middle range of rents there may be the most variation in patterns of discrimination, in part because of a mix of private and corporate ownership and because of a history of past discrimination. There is less firm a basis for predicting any connection between rent level and discrimination than with other concepts in this study, so we pose the following research question:

> *Research Question 1*: What is the relationship between rent and discrimination on the basis of names?

Finally, when a landlord wishes not to rent to an applicant making an inquiry (for legitimate reasons or illegitimate reasons), at least two basic approaches are available: (a) to overtly discourage the applicant by replying to the inquiry and, for instance, claiming that the apartment is no longer available or (b) to simply ignore the inquiry, thus covertly discouraging the applicant. While we have no basis for predicting which manner of negative

responses would be employed in response to the different names signed to the inquiries in this study, it is possible to look for patterns in the data collected.

> *Research Question 2*: What is the relationship between types of negative responses and the apparent ethnicity of an applicant's name?

Method

The general strategy in this research was to identify landlords offering apartments who could be contacted by electronic mail and to vary only the name of the applicant in the e-mail inquiry. This allowed for many landlords to be contacted in a short period of time and for great similarity in each landlord's exposure to the experimental treatment (i.e., the inquiry).

The experiment was conducted in the Los Angeles County housing market. This urban community presumably exposes landlords to applications from a diverse ethnic population on an everyday basis. The U.S. Census for 2000 provided the following figures regarding the self-identified ethnic populations of interest in this study: African American, 9.8%; Arab, 0.7%; White, 48.7%. The census also reported a total of 3,133,774 households in Los Angeles County, of which 52% were rental units (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002, 2003).

Design

Landlords offering apartments for rent were identified using two popular Web sites. Landlords were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. Each group received a one-line inquiry by electronic mail regarding the availability of the advertised apartment; only the name signed by the "applicant" was varied. One group of landlords received an inquiry signed "Patrick McDougall"; another group received the same inquiry, signed "Tyrell Jackson"; the third group's inquiry was signed "Said Al-Rahman."

Electronic-mail accounts for each "applicant" were created, and landlords' responses to each message were collected in those accounts. Responses were coded as to whether they provided encouragement or discouragement to pursue the apartment, or whether the response flatly announced that the apartment was no longer available. Landlords who failed to respond at all were also noted. After 10 weeks the e-mail accounts were closed, and all landlords were sent a message debriefing them as to the nature and purpose of the experiment and the identity of the researchers.

Participants

Two Web sites, www.craigslist.com and www.recycler.com, were chosen based on their popularity with landlords and renters, availability of listings, and free access to listings. We found a large number of landlords advertising apartments in Los Angeles County on the Internet and found that two types of landlords (corporate and private) advertise extensively on the Internet.

The experiment was conducted over a 10-week period on a sample of 1,115 listings. A random-number generator was used to scramble the numbers from 1 to 1,115. The three experimental names were then coded as follows:

> N1: Patrick McDougall (White)
>
> N2: Tyrell Jackson (African American)
>
> N3: Said Al-Rahman (Arab)

The name codes (N1, N2, N3) were paired with the randomly scrambled numbers ($n = 1,115$).

Procedure

An e-mail message was sent to the 1,115 landlords. These e-mails had the same body of text (i.e., inquiring about the apartment's availability and requesting a response) and the same message in the subject line (i.e., "Question about the apartment"). The only variable manipulated was the name signing the messages.

These names of the potential tenants were chosen by consulting the Census Bureau Population Division's list of first and last name distribution in the United States and by informal canvassing of colleagues and acquaintances in the ethnic groups of interest. In order to balance and minimize the influence of an attractiveness effect on the quality of responses received, we tried to choose names that might occur at medium frequency in the populations at large. The average rankings associated with the full names (first name and last name) on a scale from most popular (1) to least popular (10,000) are as follows: Patrick McDougall (1,939), Tyrell Jackson (516), Said Al-Rahman (3,825) (United States Census Bureau, Population Division, 2002). While unscientific, these methods quickly produced three names that were readily associated with the intended ethnic groups, and the results reported below provide post-hoc evidence of the validity of this manipulation.

Rent. The rental amount was also recorded (as observed from the ad). The rents were divided into the following categories: less than \$1,000, between \$1,000 and \$1,500, and more than \$1,500.

Type of ownership. We were also interested in seeing whether landlords who privately own apartments up for rent behave differently from those who work for a corporation and advertise for apartments they themselves do not own. To account for this, we placed landlords in either private or corporate categories. In the case of recycler.com, the listings were already separated by private and corporate ownership. For craigslist.com, an apartment was coded for ownership only if the information provided in the listing strongly suggested private or corporate ownership, such as an explicit mention of ownership status, or other indirect clues, including e-mail addresses similar to manager@genericcopapts.com, contact information at corporate offices, formality of the text, and "contact the owner" information. We found that a majority of landlords were easily ascribed to one of the two categories.

Response. The dependent variable was type of response. Responses were coded as positive if the apartment was reported to be available. Negative responses could take two forms. Responses were overtly negative if the apartment was said to be not available and covertly negative if there was no response to the inquiry. The distinction between covert and overt negative responses may help distinguish between strategies landlords might employ to avoid renting to one or another type of applicant, but it is important to note that from a real applicant's point of view, the negative impact of no response is essentially the same as being told that the apartment is not available. For this reason, most analyses were conducted using the basic positive/negative distinction.

Hypotheses 1 and 3 are best tested by examining differences in response patterns (whether the response is positive or negative). Hypotheses 2 and 4 concern the overall pattern of positive (apartment-available) versus negative responses.

The following variables were held constant:

- The type of housing offered: Inquiries were limited to those landlords offering one-bedroom apartments.

- The e-mail addresses of the applicants were all as follows: (first name)(random code generated by local Internet provider)@(local Internet provider).net

- Gender: Only male names were used. Landlords' gender could not be controlled.

Our decision to use only male names requires explanation. Our primary concern is with discrimination based on ethnic stereotypes activated by names. Certainly such stereotypes could be activated by female names, but for landlords female and male applicants differ according to other factors that intersect with ethnic stereotypes in complex ways that we did not have the means to control in this study. For instance, a landlord is more likely to speculate whether a female applicant for a one-bedroom apartment has children. While discrimination on this basis is no more legal than discrimination based on ethnicity, it is an added dimension that would complicate interpretation of responses.

Timing relative to the war in Iraq. Finally, we needed to take into account the fact that the experiment took place before and during the military campaign in Iraq in the spring of 2003. Given these circumstances, and the possibility of a swift change in behavior after the conflict began, we recorded the data in two categories, namely "prewar" and "during war."

Results

Out of 1,115 inquiries sent, 816 (73%) received any reply at all. Of the replies, 782 (96% of all replies, 70% of all outcomes) were an invitation to see the apartment (i.e., a positive, apartment-available response), 34 (4% of all replies, 3% of all outcomes) received a reply mentioning that the apartment had already been rented (overt negative responses), and 299 (27% of all outcomes) did not receive a reply (covert negative responses). We combined the overt and covert negative responses into one category of negative responses ($n = 333$). Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of responses to the apartment inquiries.

White and Non-White Names

Hypothesis 1 predicted that White-sounding names would receive disproportionately more responses (positive or negative) than others. Of the 816 responses, "Patrick McDougall" received 328, or 40%, $\chi^2(1, N = 1,115) = 73.06$, $p < .001$. The White-sounding name received a response to 89% of the inquiries, while the non-White-sounding names received a reply to only 65% of their inquiries.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the White-sounding name would prompt more positive responses than either other name. Of the 782 positive responses, "Patrick McDougall" received 325, or 42%, $\chi^2(1, N = 1,115) = 88.63$, $p < .001$; 89% of all the responses to the White-sounding applicant were positive. Non-White-sounding applicants received positive replies to only 61% of their inquiries. The White-sounding name received

Table 1

Responses to Apartment Inquiries

	White		African American		Arab	
	+	-	+	-	+	-
Rent						
< $1,000	84%	16%	68%	32%	53%	47%
$1,000–$1,500	91%	9%	47%	53%	70%	30%
> $1,500	90%	10%	60%	40%	70%	30%
Ownership						
Private	88%	12%	53%	47%	62%	38%
Corporate	91%	9%	59%	41%	75%	25%
Timing						
Prewar	90%	10%	58%	42%	68%	32%
During war	87%	13%	55%	45%	65%	35%
Totals	89%	11%	56%	44%	66%	34%

Note. + indicates a positive response; - indicates a negative response.

significantly more responses and more positive responses than the non-White names. On the whole, the White-sounding name was 79% likely to receive a positive reply to an inquiry, while non-White-sounding names received a positive reply to 40% of their inquiries.

When time (prewar or during the war) was controlled for, the White-sounding applicant's advantage did not change. The White-sounding name received 39% of all the prewar replies and 41% of all replies during the war. In both cases the White-sounding name's advantage was highly statistically significant. Of the positive responses, 41% of the prewar responses were addressed to the fictional Mr. McDougall, and 42% of the responses during the war were addressed to him.

African American and Arab Names

Hypothesis 3 predicted that landlords would reply to the African American name more often than to the Arab name. In fact, of the 488 responses

addressed to these names, 55% were addressed to "Said Al-Rahman," $\chi^2(1,$ $N = 748) = 17.58$, $p < .001$. Hypothesis 4 predicted that of the positive responses addressed to either the African American or Arab name, the African American name would receive the most. In fact, of the 457 positive responses these two names received, 54% were addressed to the Arab-sounding name, $\chi^2(1, N = 748) = 7.89$, $p < .01$.

The onset of war did not affect the overall pattern of responses to the African American and Arab names. The tendency for landlords to reply at all to the Arab name more often than the African American name remained firmly established. The war did seem to matter slightly where positive and negative replies were concerned, but in an unexpected way. Prior to the war, the Arab name received 54% positive responses, $\chi^2(1, N = 345) = 3.74$, $p = .053$; after the war started, the Arab name still received 54% positive replies, but the distribution was changed enough to cross the .05 threshold of statistical significance, $\chi^2(1, N = 403) = 4.13$, $p = .042$.

Private and Corporate Landlords

Hypothesis 5 predicted that corporate landlords would exhibit less discrimination than private landlords. Out of 1,115 listings considered, 459 were coded as private landlords and 445 were coded as corporate landlords. Overall (i.e., when the implicit ethnicity of the names is not considered), private and corporate landlords did not differ in their likelihood of responding to inquiries or responding positively. The White-sounding applicant received more positive responses from both private landlords, $\chi^2(2, N = 459) = 47.53$, $p < .001$, and corporate landlords, $\chi^2(2, N = 445) = 40.46$, $p < .001$. There was no significant difference between the types of landlords in their tendencies to encourage the White-sounding applicant to visit the apartment advertised. There was no significant difference in the likelihood of corporate or private landlords responding to the African American- and Arab-sounding names.

Rent

Rental amount also made no difference where the White-sounding applicant's advantage was concerned. The White-sounding applicant received more positive responses in all rental categories considered: less than $1,000, $\chi^2(2, N = 293) = 23.23$, $p < .001$; between $1,000 and $1,500, $\chi^2(2, N = 486) = 76.86$, $p < .001$; more than $1,500, $\chi^2(2, N = 336) = 20.80$, $p < .001$. Rent did prove to distinguish between responses to the African American- and Arab-sounding names. "Said Al-Rahman" received any reply between 67% and 74% of the time across the three rental categories. "Tyrell

Jackson" received any reply between 47% and 68% of the time; in the middle rent category these inquiries received replies only 47% of the time. That outcome was the only cell in any of the cross-tabulations reported in this study in which *any* applicant failed to receive a positive response more than half the time (see Table 1). The African American-sounding name's treatment in the middle rent category was significantly different than that name's treatment in the other two categories, $\chi^2(2, N = 376) = 12.10$, $p < .01$, and significantly different from that of the Arab-sounding name in the middle category, $\chi^2(1, N = 315) = 17.36$, $p < .001$. In the highest rent category, the difference between replies to the Arab- and African American-sounding names approached statistical significance and once again favored the Arab-sounding name, $\chi^2(1, N = 259) = 3.02$, $p = .08$.

Overt and Covert Negative Responses

While the ostensibly White and African American applicants differed significantly in their likelihood of receiving a positive response, when they did receive a negative response, they were about equally likely to receive a covert negative response (i.e., no response at all). Some examples of overtly negative responses are "the apartment has been rented"; "it's no longer available"; "I'm sorry, the place has been already leased." The White-sounding name's negative responses were covert 93% of the time, while the African American-sounding name's negative responses were covert 96% of the time. The Arab-sounding name's negative responses were significantly more likely than the others to be overt; only 81% of negative replies to this name were covert, $\chi^2(2, N = 333) = 17.58$, $p < .001$. The Arab applicant was thus more likely to be explicitly told not to bother visiting the complex since the apartment was no longer available.

The war's beginning seemed to influence the types of responses landlords addressed to the non-White applicants. The Arab name received a total of 24 overtly negative responses, but only 7 of them (29%) came after the war began, $\chi^2(1, N = 126) = 8.36$, $p < .01$. Of the seven overtly negative responses addressed to the African American-sounding name, only one came after the war began, $\chi^2(1, N = 165) = 5.10$, $p < .05$.

Discussion

This study was designed to test whether there is discrimination in housing against a person with an Arab-sounding name in Los Angeles County. In support of our first two hypotheses, we found that names, and their implied ethnicity, do indeed play a role in landlords' decisions to encourage a

prospective tenant and in the quality of their responses to inquiries. The data illustrate that a person with an Arab-sounding name was three times more likely to be discouraged from visiting an apartment for rent than a person with a White-sounding name. Furthermore, we found that a person with an African American-sounding name was four times more likely to be discouraged than an applicant with a White-sounding name.

Even though previous research consistently shows that discrimination against African Americans is a persistent social problem in the United States, we were somewhat surprised to find our third and fourth hypotheses not supported; the African-American-sounding applicant was treated significantly worse than the Arab-sounding one. Given the tense political climate surrounding the relationship between the United States and the Arab world after September 11, 2001, plus the tensions with Iraq that ultimately led to war during the time these data were gathered, we expected the most animosity to be directed towards the Arab-sounding name. The Arab-sounding name did receive three times more overtly negative responses ($n = 24$) than the African American-sounding name ($n = 7$) and eight times more than the White-sounding name ($n = 3$).

An interesting phenomenon occurred when these responses were analyzed in terms of the prewar/during-war dimension. While the Arab- and African American-sounding names received the same proportion of overall negative responses during the war as afterward, during the war the negative replies were significantly more likely to be covert than overt. Apparently, landlords simply changed strategies when the war started. In other words, landlords who expressed their prejudice openly before the war may have gone into "hiding" during the war, yet still discriminated. This phenomenon may represent a new aspect of social discrimination: passive discrimination when the national sociopolitical climate promotes ethnic cohesion and diverts the individual's attention from indigenous civil-rights issues towards the threat of an elusive, foreign enemy.

The severe discrimination observed against the African American-sounding applicant illustrates the practical barriers to equal participation in the economy that African Americans continue to confront. Some have noted that since the modern Civil Rights Movement's peak in the mid-1960s racism in America has undergone a change (Ball-Rokeach & Loges, 1994; Kleinpenning & Hagendoorn, 1993; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1985; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993). As support for such policies as affirmative action has waned, it is unclear whether White Americans remain willing to support practical integrationist policies that correspond to their expressed support for racial equality (Schuman et al., 1985). Sniderman and Piazza reviewed years of survey data and noted that it is increasingly the case that White Americans look for evidence that African

Americans are "deserving" of the kind of policies that will intervene in free markets for jobs, housing, and other social goods. The present study shows that long before an African American man gets a chance to show what he is capable of, discrimination tilts the scales against him in ways he may not even be able to observe. Arab Americans face similar obstacles. There is no reason to believe that "Patrick McDougall" "deserves" anything at all, but he takes into the housing economy an advantage that "Said Al-Rahman" and "Tyrell Jackson" do not.

The middle range of rents in this study, between $1,000 and $1,500 a month, is usual for one-bedroom apartments in Los Angeles County (DHUD, Office of Policy Development and Research, 2001), and we find landlords significantly less likely to respond positively to the African American-sounding applicant in this rent bracket. Perhaps landlords tend to see African Americans as less likely to afford that rent. This explanation is supported by the text of some of the positive responses addressed to "Tyrell Jackson," in which the landlords specify the rental amount in their reply; for example, the response: "Please note that the rent is $1,100 a month." Neither the White-sounding nor the Arab-sounding applicant *ever* received such a specification throughout the study; the African American-sounding applicant received nine such responses.

In the case of the Arab-sounding name, discrimination tended to decrease as rents rose. This may be because the higher the rent, the more landlords assume that any tenant who can afford the rent is going to be a responsible tenant. In each of the two highest rent categories, the Arab-sounding applicant name received 70% positive responses, up from 53% in the lowest rent category. This did not hold true for the African American-sounding applicant, however, for whom the highest level of positive responses was observed in the lowest rent category (68%). The African American-sounding name received its lowest rate of positive response (47%) in the midrange rent category. Positive responses did rebound to 60% in the highest category; however, not only does that still indicate less encouragement than in the lowest category, but it is far lower than the positive rates in the highest rent category that the Arab-sounding or the White-sounding name received.

It appears appropriate to conclude from our findings that name discrimination is a reality outside the laboratory experiments of Erwin and Calev (1984), Daniel and Daniel (1998), and Erwin (1999). As such, further attention needs to be given to this phenomenon and to its implications concerning the ability of minorities to exercise equal housing rights. If barriers begin with a name, then we may only imagine what happens later in the process when a person is searching for an apartment. It appears that the person with an Arab-sounding name and the person with an African

American-sounding name in this study were systematically screened out by landlords before they had a chance to show whether their income, credit, employment, and references would qualify them to rent. Furthermore, while the war did not much affect the landlords' overall compliance with protectionist laws (such as FHA), it did seem to provoke a trend toward more covert discrimination. This kind of discrimination is an intangible state of mind that laws seem not to overcome.

Conclusions and Implications

The temptation to treat the Internet as a cyberspace in which real-world identities, and all the prejudices that accompany them, are suspended might lead apartment hunters to prefer making inquiries online if they fear discrimination. Our results demonstrate that landlords might react to the most basic of cues in an inquiry and act in a discriminatory manner even where Internet inquiries are concerned. People seeking information about housing online might be advised to disclose as little about themselves as they can in their initial inquiries, including their names. Landlords interested in avoiding accusations of discrimination, including subconscious reactions to the names of applicants, might consider employing an anonymous system for initial inquiries (such as the availability inquiry used in this study) so as not to discourage minorities from making formal applications.

But inevitably a person seeking an apartment must reveal his or her name. Perhaps delaying that moment to the latest date possible, when the applicant has exchanged inquiries and responses with the landlord, will allow a relationship to build between the two that mitigates any discrimination that might have been the landlord's first impulse. But that seems optimistic. The persistence of discrimination against African Americans, demonstrated once again in this study, shows how stubborn such prejudice can be.

For all the clarity of these findings, this study's design did not allow for some analyses that would extend our knowledge of the way discrimination distorts the housing market. Further research should include female names. Ideally, any such research would also explore replies women receive by controlling for children (the e-mail inquiry could mention a child). The intersection of gender, race, and hostility to children would shed light on experiences that present findings indicate thousands of people have daily. Adding Hispanic names to the ethnicities, particularly in cities with large Hispanic populations such as Los Angeles, would also be very valuable if we are to understand the full scope of this problem. Using more than one name of each ethnicity would also allow some control for the effects of the relative attractiveness of some names over others, even within ethnic groups.

Another disadvantage in this design, somewhat more difficult to overcome, is the inability to control for any personal characteristics of the responding landlords, such as their ethnicity or gender. Follow-up inquiries might elicit more details about the landlord's decision but probably (given the high number of nonresponses, particularly among the non-White-sounding applicants) would require a much larger number of initial inquiries in order to count on a sufficient number of follow-ups.

We also understand the limitations of conducting this experiment on the Internet, and particularly on the two Web sites considered, and the possibility of embedded confounding variables in that unique environment. Further studies should attempt to minimize the impact of such confounding variables by comparing results from inquiries made in a variety of media and expanding the number of sources of advertisements.

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