Implicit Bias in Hiring: Leveraging Avatars to Foster Inclusive Hiring Practices

Can virtual interviews that use racially ambiguous avatars help reduce unconscious racial bias, improve fairness in candidate evaluations, and ultimately lead to more diverse and inclusive hiring outcomes?

This dissertation by Alexa S. Trifilo examines whether extended reality (XR) technology can be used to mask a candidate's racial identity during interviews, reducing implicit in-group bias and promoting fairer hiring outcomes. The research builds on the concept of "blind" hiring, applying it beyond resumes to real-time interview settings where visual cues often shape judgment. Using AI-generated, racially ambiguous avatars, the study aimed to preserve human connection while concealing race.

The research unfolded in two phases. First, three pilot studies refined the avatars, interview scripts, and survey design. Avatars were tested for credibility, relatability, and racial ambiguity through both human and AI evaluation. Feedback improved realism, pacing, and clarity of candidate responses. Participants' perceptions of job fit measured through person–job, person–group, and person–organization fit were central to the evaluation process.

The main experiment compared participant ratings of candidates represented by ambiguous avatars versus racially identifiable White or Asian avatars, also factoring in candidate qualifications (strong vs. ambiguous). Results indicated that candidate qualifications were a key consideration for participants, and that avatar type did not significantly change hiring recommendations in this study. The avatars successfully masked racial cues, suggesting they may help prevent bias from emerging in certain contexts. Comfort with avatar interaction varied among participants, and those less comfortable sometimes rated candidates lower, suggesting that broader adoption may require cultural and organizational adaptation.

The findings highlight XR's potential in reducing bias during interviews while noting challenges around realism, user comfort, and organizational readiness. This technology, if implemented thoughtfully, could complement broader diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies in hiring.

MAJOR TAKEAWAYS:

● Racially ambiguous avatars effectively obscure visual racial cues in interviews, which may help keep evaluations focused on job-related criteria.

● Participants reported focusing on candidate qualifications when making hiring recommendations, though this study found no statistically significant difference between strong and ambiguous qualification profiles.

● Comfort with XR avatars varies, affecting acceptance and potential for widespread adoption.

WHO NEEDS TO KNOW:

● Employers
● Developers
● Researchers

CONTACT US:

● Alexa S. Trifilo, Doctor of Business Administration
Lex875@aol.com
● Dissertation supervisor: Gary Blau, Professor, Management
gary.blau@temple.edu
● Dissertation: Implicit Bias in Hiring: Leveraging Avatars to Foster Inclusive Hiring Practices

Fox School of Business

Learn more about the Translational Research Center
fox.temple.edu/trc