

Effective disclosure strategies for job applicants with a criminal record: addressing the how, why and who to increase hiring intentions

Equality, Diversity
and Inclusion: An
International
Journal

347

Christine Henle, Tiffany Trzebiatowski and Tammy Li
Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado, USA

Received 30 July 2025
Revised 9 March 2026
4 May 2026
Accepted 18 June 2026

Abstract

Purpose – Individuals with a concealable stigma often face employment discrimination and as a result choose to conceal it in employment settings. However, unlike other concealable stigmas, job applicants with a criminal record are usually forced to reveal their stigma due to background checks. To help job applicants successfully overcome employment barriers, we seek to identify how this population can disclose their record in a way that reduces bias and avoids discrimination.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing on the stereotype content model and BIAS map framework, we employ an experimental design in which we manipulate disclosure strategy (integration vs decategorization), controllability of the criminal record (low vs high) and disclosure source (applicant vs professional reference).

Findings – We found a three-way interaction in which decategorization enhanced recruiters' hiring intentions via perceived competence of a job applicant with a criminal record but only when controllability was low (criminal record was due to extenuating circumstances vs a character flaw) and the applicant self-disclosed vs having a professional reference disclose the record.

Originality/value – We extend the literature on concealable stigmas by demonstrating that job applicants with a criminal record can overcome hiring discrimination by crafting a self-disclosure that downplays their record and points out the role of situational factors.

Keywords Criminal record, Employment discrimination, Diversity and inclusion, Disclosure strategies

Paper type Research article

Individuals with stigmas, attributes or social identities that are undesirable or discrediting, face many challenges due to their perceived differentness (Crocker *et al.*, 1998; Goffman, 1963). According to Link and Phelan (2001), a stigma emerges when a set of interrelated processes occur. First, a stigma must be labeled as a salient individual difference and associated with negative characteristics that trigger stereotypes. Next, the process of labeling and stereotyping serves to categorize those with the difference as “them” and those without it as “us.” Relegation to outgroup membership then results in a loss of status and increased discrimination because individuals lack the economic, social and political power to fight against mistreatment.

One critical feature of a stigma is its concealability, which refers to how obvious, visible or detectable it is (Goffman, 1963; Jones *et al.*, 1984). For example, physical disabilities are considered low on concealability, whereas mental health conditions may be largely invisible. Concealability is an important characteristic of stigmas because it determines whether individuals are labeled, stereotyped, ostracized and discriminated against (Jones *et al.*, 1984). Job applicants with invisible or concealable stigmas (e.g. mental disabilities, minoritized sexual orientations, certain religious affiliations, ambiguous racial identities, lower economic or social class statuses) are often subjected to bias and discrimination in the hiring process



© Christine Henle, Tiffany Trzebiatowski and Tammy Li. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/>

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An
International Journal
Vol. 45 No. 9, 2026
pp. 347-363
Emerald Publishing Limited
e-ISSN: 2040-7157
p-ISSN: 2040-7149
DOI 10.1108/EDI-07-2025-0507

should their stigma be discovered, and thus often have a difficult time finding employment (e.g. [Bryant-Lees and Kite, 2021](#); [Rivera and Tilcsik, 2016](#); [Ruggs and McGonagle, 2023](#)). Due to the threat of stigmatization and discrimination, many job applicants with a concealable stigma choose to conceal it during the hiring process (e.g. [Clair et al., 2005](#); [Ragins et al., 2007](#); [Santuzzi et al., 2014](#)). However, job applicants with a criminal record face unique challenges as compared to others with stigmatized identities.

First, people with a criminal record in the United States experience an unemployment rate of 27%, which is five times higher than those without a record and greater than the unemployment rate during the worst parts of the Great Depression ([Couloute and Kopf, 2018](#)). Additionally, it is significantly greater than the unemployment rates for other stigmatized groups based on disability or race ([Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2026](#); [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2026](#)). Second, individuals with a criminal record are recognized as one of the most stigmatized groups ([LeBel, 2012](#)) and reluctance toward hiring this population may arise from the negative stereotypes often associated with them, such as being dangerous and unskilled ([Braman, 2004](#); [Hirschfield and Piquero, 2010](#)). Indeed, research demonstrates that job applicants with a criminal record are half as likely to receive a callback than those without a criminal background ([Pager, 2003](#)). Third, unlike other concealable stigmas, individuals with a criminal record often lack a choice regarding whether to keep their stigma hidden. Although some US states (e.g. CA, NY, WA) have passed Ban the Box laws that prohibit employers from asking about an applicant's criminal history during the initial application process, a criminal record is often revealed later in the hiring process during mandatory background checks ([Baur et al., 2018](#)). This lack of volition presents yet another barrier to employment that other stigmatized identities do not face.

Taken together, the key differences between criminal records and other concealable stigmas highlight the importance of identifying effective ways for job applicants to disclose their record to potential employers. Effective disclosure strategies are important because organizations that have hired employees with records have found them to be hard-working, engaged and appreciative since they often receive limited opportunities and desire to prove themselves ([Griffith and Young, 2017](#)). Additionally, they often have lower turnover, higher promotion rates and faster pay trajectories than those without a record ([Lundquist et al., 2018](#)). These benefits, paired with ongoing talent shortages, should serve as a call to action for employers to be more inclusive toward this often overlooked group ([Korzenik, 2021](#)).

Our study advances the diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) literature, particularly work related to the disclosure of concealable stigmas, in four ways. First, we call attention to an underrepresented DEI category ([Gardner et al., 2023](#)). Criminal record status, as a socially stigmatized identity, shapes individuals' access to employment in ways that systematically disadvantage certain groups of people. For example, in the United States, the criminal justice system disproportionately affects certain racial and socioeconomic groups such as Black, Indigenous and Hispanic men ([Carson and Kluckow, 2023](#)). This reinforces broader structural inequalities and suggests a need to better understand how organizations view individuals with criminal records as a marginalized group. Their inclusion in hiring practices can support broader DEI goals by expanding employment opportunities for individuals who have historically faced systemic exclusion.

Second, we examine the efficacy of two disclosure strategies for individuals with a criminal record, integration (i.e. highlighting the positive features of having a criminal record such as increased resiliency and ability to overcome challenges) and decategorization (i.e. downplaying the criminal record by emphasizing a more positive identity such as college graduate or community volunteer). Few studies have looked at these strategies in combination with other concealable stigmas and most focus on disclosure to coworkers post-hire (e.g. [Barth and Wessel, 2022](#); [Johnson and Joshi, 2016](#); [Lynch and Rodell, 2018](#)) except for [Lyons et al. \(2017\)](#), which examined disclosure of a concealable physical disability during hiring. However, a criminal record vs concealable disabilities presents unique challenges because of the lack of choice related to disclosure, absence of legal protections in employment

(especially in the United States) and perceptions that a record is the result of a character flaw (Baur *et al.*, 2018; Young and Powell, 2005). Research is needed to determine the generalizability of these disclosure strategies. We argue that decategorization is a more viable option for individuals with a criminal record than integration. This is contrary to past research (e.g. Lyons *et al.*, 2017) suggesting that integration is more effective for disclosing concealable stigmas such as disabilities and it implies that all concealable stigmas are not created equal and research cannot be indiscriminately generalized across stigmas.

Third, although past research drawing on the stereotype content model (Fiske *et al.*, 2002) and the behaviors from intergroup affect and stereotypes (BIAS) map framework (Cuddy *et al.*, 2007) has examined the relationship between job applicants' perceived warmth and competence and their likelihood of being hired (e.g. Henle *et al.*, 2020), we extend these theories by exploring the predictors of warmth and competence perceptions. Specifically, we propose that disclosure strategies can be used to enhance perceptions of warmth and competence. Given the negative stereotypes often linked to individuals with criminal records (e.g. dangerous, hostile, dishonest, lazy, unskilled, unintelligent), they are likely to be perceived as low in warmth as well as competence. However, disclosure strategies may be effective at increasing the assessment of this population as warm and competent, which in turn should boost hiring intentions. Thus, we identify methods for helping this stigmatized population overcome biases and stereotypes during the hiring process.

Fourth, we also extend the stereotype content model and BIAS map framework by simultaneously testing two important boundary conditions of the relationship between disclosure strategies and hiring intentions via warmth and competence perceptions. Specifically, we argue that the effectiveness of decategorization depends on controllability of the criminal record and disclosure source. If job applicants are perceived as personally responsible for their criminal record (high controllability), hiring managers may be less open to individuating information provided through decategorization and modifying their initial warmth and competence stereotypes because the record will be attributed to a character flaw (Lyons *et al.*, 2017). Conversely, if the record is viewed as less controllable, hiring managers may be more receptive to individuating information because the record will be attributed to the situation or extenuating circumstances. However, if job applicants rely on professional references to disclose their record vs self-disclosure when controllability is high, they may be seen as lower on warmth and competence and less likely to be hired because they will be viewed as less well-adjusted, deceitful and as lacking initiative. Thus, we examine the three-way interaction between disclosure strategy, controllability and disclosure source because "how" a criminal record is represented may be impacted by "why" a crime was committed and "who" does the disclosing.

Theory and hypotheses

To examine how criminal record disclosure strategies shape perceptions and hiring intentions, we draw on the stereotype content model (Fiske *et al.*, 2002) and the BIAS map framework (Cuddy *et al.*, 2007). The stereotype content model (Fiske *et al.*, 2002) proposes that individuals appraise others based on their group membership and the resulting stereotypes toward outgroups can be categorized on two important dimensions: (1) *warmth* speaks to whether a group has helpful or harmful intentions toward others and (2) *competence* refers to a group's capability to enact their intentions. Warmth perceptions (e.g. friendly, trustworthy) are more likely when a group does not compete with other groups or is compliant (e.g. older individuals) vs when a group is viewed as a competitor (e.g. welfare recipients). Competence perceptions (e.g. intelligent, skillful) are more likely when a group is perceived as high status and powerful (e.g. rich individuals) vs when it is seen as low status and powerless (e.g. homeless individuals). The BIAS map framework extends the stereotype content model by arguing that the content of stereotypes (assessments of warmth and competence) can predict behavioral responses to groups (Cuddy *et al.*, 2007). When a group is perceived as low on

either warmth or competence or both, harmful behavioral intentions are likely such as discrimination, exclusion and rejection.

These frameworks are particularly well suited to our research question because they provide a clear theoretical structure linking evaluators' stigma and stereotypic evaluations to behavioral intentions. Specifically, they connect warmth and competence perceptions to hiring intentions, offering a framework for understanding how evaluators translate these judgments into behavioral intentions. Furthermore, we extend these theories by examining how criminal record disclosure impacts how applicants are judged along core stereotypical perceptions, making warmth and competence relevant mechanisms through which evaluators interpret the disclosure. We also build upon these frameworks by examining how contextual cues shape warmth and competence perceptions, such that perceived controllability and disclosure source change the strength of the stereotypic perceptions to hiring intentions link.

Given that individuals with a criminal record lack status and power in society and they compete with other groups for resources such as public assistance for housing, transportation and food, they are likely to be viewed as low on both competence and warmth. Indeed, this group is often perceived as dangerous, hostile, untrustworthy and as lacking interpersonal skills, which signals low warmth, as well as lazy, unintelligent and lacking job-related skills, which suggests low competence (Braman, 2004; Graffam *et al.*, 2008; Hirschfield and Piquero, 2010). These stereotypes, in turn, explain why this population experiences discrimination and is excluded from employment (Young and Powell, 2005). Drawing on theory and past research, we propose that job applicants with a criminal record will be rated lower on warmth and competence than applicants without a record and that these stereotypes will in turn be related to hiring intentions.

- H1. Job applicants with a criminal record have lower ratings on (a) warmth and (b) competence than job applicants without a criminal record.
- H2. (a) Warmth and (b) competence are positively related to hiring intentions.

The how – disclosure strategy

Unless something is done to disrupt the cycle, negative stereotypes will perpetuate hiring discrimination against job applicants with a criminal record. Identifying effective ways for disclosing a criminal record may enhance employment opportunities by creating a positive impression of job applicants' warmth and competence. Roberts (2005) proposed that impression management strategies can be used by individuals to manage their social identity and to mitigate the negative effects of stereotypes on others' assessments of their warmth and competence. One such strategy, integration, involves emphasizing the positive features of a stigma by highlighting how it is valuable and simultaneously challenging negative stereotypes related to it. A second strategy, decategorization, entails deemphasizing or downplaying a stigma by highlighting individuating information and recategorizing the self into a more positive identity.

Both these strategies should enhance warmth and competence perceptions because they provide additional, individuating information about job applicants and help reframe initial impressions formed by hiring managers based on applicants' group categorization as criminals (Fiske and Neuberg, 1990). Integration directly addresses warmth and competence stereotypes by redefining the meaning of a criminal record into something positive by asserting it is valuable and refuting stereotypes commonly associated with it (Lyons *et al.*, 2017). For example, individuals with a criminal record can point out how this experience resulted in personal growth, made them more resilient or adaptable or enabled them to persevere and overcome challenges. Conversely, decategorization indirectly addresses stereotypes by assigning individuals with a criminal record to a new, more positive group by providing alternative, positive individuating information and shifting attention away from the criminal record (Lyons *et al.*, 2017). This can be accomplished by emphasizing more desirable identities held by the individual such as a hard worker, active community member or dedicated student.

Past research suggests that integration may be more effective than decategorization. For example, integration reduced the negative treatment of employees at work with a concealable stigma (Lynch and Rodell, 2018), whereas decategorization resulted in more unsupportive and less supportive responses to an employee who disclosed their depression (Barth and Wessel, 2022). Of relevance to a hiring context, Lyons *et al.* (2018) found an individual with a visible disability was rated higher on competence when they used integration vs decategorization for disclosure.

Although informative, these studies are not directly relevant to the disclosure of a criminal record during the hiring process, especially since this stigma is regarded more negatively than others including chronic illnesses and physical disabilities (Graffam *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, popular press often advises individuals with a record to “convince the hiring manager that the person you were when you committed the crime is not the person you are today” (Drevno, 2014, p. 33) and to show how they have put that part of their life behind them by talking about new aspects of their life such as obtaining an education, being a volunteer, getting married or joining a religious institution. These new aspects create different, more positive identities and deemphasize the old one of having a criminal record. Taken together, decategorization may be a more appropriate disclosure strategy than integration for job applicants with a record. Thus, we expect job applicants with a criminal record who use decategorization (vs integration) to have higher warmth and competence ratings and greater subsequent ratings of hiring intentions.

- H3. Decategorization (vs integration) is positively related to hiring intentions through (a) warmth and (b) competence.

The why and who – controllability and source of disclosure

Hiring managers consider multiple factors when evaluating job applicants with a criminal record (Griffith and Young, 2017). Although disclosure strategies cover “how” job applicants should portray their criminal record (highlighting the benefits of a criminal record vs downplaying it), revealing “why” a crime was committed (character flaw vs situational factors) and “who” does the disclosing (self-disclosure vs a professional reference providing the disclosure) may also be important considerations. As a result, disclosure strategy, level of controllability and disclosure source are likely to simultaneously interact to influence hiring managers’ perceptions and decisions. Specifically, we anticipate that decategorization (vs integration) will be more likely to increase perceived warmth and competence and ultimately hiring intentions, when the criminal record is the result of extenuating circumstances and not the individual’s fault (low controllability) and when the applicant personally reveals their record (self-disclosure). Thus, we examine how controllability of the criminal record and disclosure source combine to qualify the effectiveness of decategorization.

How a stigma originates is a key consideration as individuals who are not believed to be personally responsible for the creation or development of a stigma are perceived more favorably and treated more positively and fairly (Jones *et al.*, 1984). Thus, the effectiveness of disclosure strategies in reducing stereotypes associated with a stigma may depend on the perceived controllability of the stigma or an individual’s role in producing the stigma (Bordieri and Drehmer, 1986; Hebl and Kleck, 2002). If the stigma has low controllability, the cause is thought to be situational and not a personal fault, which should make hiring managers open to the additional information conveyed in the disclosure. Conversely, when a stigma has high controllability, the cause will be attributed to a character flaw and additional information provided may not prompt recategorization. Across two studies, Lyons *et al.* (2017) found disclosure strategies increased hiring intentions for an applicant with a concealable stigma (permanent hearing loss) via reduced pity reactions, but this relationship only occurred when the applicant was not seen as responsible for their disability (low controllability).

Drawing on past research, we propose that decategorization will be more effective when job applicants highlight that their criminal record was due to extenuating circumstances beyond their control (e.g. poverty, lack of education, family hardship) vs when they admit that their record was a result of a personal failing (e.g. greed, laziness, poor decision making). That is, job applicants are more likely to be viewed as warm and competent when the situation resulting in their criminal record was due to personal hardships beyond their control. However, given how negatively individuals with criminal records are perceived during the hiring process (Baur *et al.*, 2018; Graffam *et al.*, 2008), the effectiveness of decategorization may depend not only on why the crime was committed but also on who discloses it.

Although popular press books and research advise applicants with a criminal record to have someone, preferably a professional reference, recommend them for a job, vouch for hiring them and serve as a character reference in order to negate their ex-offender status (Blessett and Pryor, 2013; Drevno, 2014; Korzenik, 2021; Western and Sirois, 2019), job applicants who rely on others to disclose their criminal record may be less likely to be perceived favorably and to be hired (Jones and King, 2014). If an applicant with a record relies on others to disclose on their behalf, especially when the record is the result of a personal failing (high controllability), they are likely to be perceived as not well-adjusted, dishonest and as withholding vital information. Failing to take the initiative to self-disclose and relying on others for disclosure may undermine the benefits of low controllability because it will reflect poorly on job applicants' character, integrity and competence. Conversely, proactively disclosing a criminal record, especially when the record is due to extenuating circumstances (low controllability), will provide additional confirmation to hiring managers that the applicant is honest, likeable, warm and willing to be vulnerable, which should suppress or counteract negative stereotypes related to this stigma (Baur *et al.*, 2018; Graber and Zitek, 2022). Thus, we argue that controllability needs to be low and the job applicant needs to self-disclose for decategorization to enhance warmth and competence perceptions and subsequent hiring intentions.

- H4. The indirect effect of decategorization (vs integration) on hiring intentions through (a) warmth and (b) competence is moderated by controllability and disclosure source at the first stage, such that the mediation effect is stronger when controllability is low and the job applicant is the source of disclosure.

Method

Study material development

Before testing our hypotheses, we needed to develop and verify the effectiveness of our study materials. To determine if our disclosure strategy and controllability manipulations work as expected, we surveyed 100 US participants recruited through Prolific and paid each participant \$1.80. We dropped four participants for failing at least one attention check item (e.g. Click “A little” for this item), which resulted in a final sample of 96. Most participants identified as male (58%), held a bachelor's degree (40%), were White (74%) and had an average age of 44.86 years (*SD* = 13.02). Participants primarily worked full-time (98%), had an average tenure of 9.33 years (*SD* = 7.91) and had about 22.51 years (*SD* = 12.64) of work experience. Sixty-eight percent had personal experience with making hiring decisions and 68% of those with experience helped with a hiring decision within the last year.

First, participants read the disclosure conditions (integration, decategorization, low controllability, high controllability), which were presented in a randomized order. After reading each one, they answered two items asking about whether the applicant is highlighting the benefits of a criminal record, which indicates integration (e.g. “This person is emphasizing the positive aspects of having a criminal record”), two items regarding if the applicant is downplaying their criminal record and stressing other aspects about themselves, which signals decategorization (e.g. “This person is downplaying their criminal record by focusing on other parts of who they are”), or three items about how personally responsible the applicant is for

their criminal record, which represents controllability (e.g. “This person’s criminal record is their fault”). The items were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from “Not at all” to “Extremely.”

The integration condition was rated higher in integration ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.23$) than the decategorization condition ($M = 1.76$, $SD = 1.02$, $t(190) = 8.19$, $p < 0.001$), whereas the decategorization condition was rated higher in decategorization ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.14$) than the integration condition ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.08$, $t(190) = 5.79$, $p < 0.001$). The high controllability condition was rated higher in perceived responsibility ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 0.73$) than the low controllability condition ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.07$, $t(190) = 5.23$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the disclosure manipulations are effective.

Second, we tested the applicant race manipulations because of the intersectionality of criminal records with race (Gardner et al., 2023). In the United States, Black individuals are five times more likely to be imprisoned than White individuals (Carson and Kluckow, 2023), which suggests the challenges of gaining employment for job applicants with a criminal record are compounded by race with Black applicants paying a higher price than White applicants. In a series of studies, Black applicants with a record were less than half as likely to receive a callback from an employer compared to their White counterparts even when equally qualified (Pager, 2003; Pager et al., 2009). Thus, discrimination based on criminal records is greater for Blacks vs Whites, which suggests that the importance of disclosure strategies may depend on race. For example, Gardner et al. (2023) found that when Black job applicants with a criminal record used impression management tactics to disclose their incarceration, they increased recruiters’ hiring recommendations.

Following a similar procedure used by Bertrand and Mullianathan (2004), we asked participants to identify which race (Black/African American, White or Other) they associated with Peter Anderson and Antwan Booker. Results indicate that 100% of participants perceived Peter Anderson as White and 96% perceived Antwan Booker as Black, thus we used those names to signal the applicant’s race.

Taken together, these results provide evidence that our study materials functioned as intended. Having established the effectiveness of these manipulations, we next conducted the main study to test our hypotheses regarding how and when disclosure strategies shape warmth and competence perceptions and, in turn, hiring intentions.

Study procedure and sample

We collected data at two points in time from full-time US employees with hiring experience recruited through Prolific (individuals who helped develop the study materials were not eligible to participate). At Time 1, participants completed a survey asking about their demographics as well as their work and hiring experience. At Time 2, about two weeks later, participants assumed the role of a recruiter for a customer service representative. Using a between-subjects design, participants were randomly assigned to one of 18 conditions in which we manipulated disclosure strategy (decategorization vs integration), controllability of the criminal record (low vs high), disclosure source (job applicant vs professional reference) and race of the applicant (White vs Black). As part of the 18 conditions, there was a control condition for a Black and White job applicant in which no criminal record was mentioned.

After reviewing the job description for the position, participants read the application materials including a cover letter, resume and letter of recommendation from a former supervisor (see Appendix). The resume was identical across conditions except that half of the resumes had a White sounding name (Peter Anderson) and half had a Black sounding name (Antwan Booker). Given 93% of individuals with a criminal record are male (Carson and Kluckow, 2023) and to avoid a confound with gender, we held gender constant by presenting a male applicant. We manipulated the disclosure strategy and controllability in either the cover letter (applicant disclosure) or in the letter of recommendation (professional reference

disclosure). After reviewing the application materials, participants rated the applicant on warmth and competence and reported how likely they would be to hire the applicant.

A total of 599 participants completed Time 1 with 549 of them also completing Time 2 for a retention rate of 91.7%. Twenty-three participants missed at least one of our five attention checks that were distributed throughout both surveys (e.g. “Click somewhat agree for this item.”) and 61 participants were removed for failing the manipulation checks at Time 2 regarding whether the job applicant had a criminal record and the source of disclosure. Within the final sample ($N = 465$), participants were 32.3% female, 70.3% Caucasian and 80.4% held an associate’s degree or higher. On average, participants were 41.03 years old ($SD = 10.59$), worked 42.83 h per week ($SD = 6.38$) and had a tenure of 8.31 years ($SD = 6.65$). Participants had an average of 8.38 years ($SD = 7.86$) of management experience.

Measures

Warmth. This scale asked participants, “To what extent do you believe this job applicant is . . .” and contained five items (good-natured, trustworthy, friendly, sincere, tolerant) that captured warmth (Graber and Zitek, 2022). Participants responded using a 5-point scale from “Not at all” to “Extremely” and the measure had a coefficient alpha of 0.89.

Competence. Participants were presented with the same question stem and 5-point scale (“Not at all” to “Extremely”) as the warmth scale. The five items comprising competence include fair, capable, skillful, intelligent and confident (Graber and Zitek, 2022). Coefficient alpha was 0.89.

Hiring intentions. This scale was measured with three items (“How acceptable is this job applicant for the job?”, “How likely would you be to hire this applicant?” and “I would recommend this person to be hired.”) on their respective 5-point Likert scales (“Not at all” to “To a great extent,” “Not at all likely” to “Very likely” and “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”) and had an alpha of 0.95.

Race as a control. Applicant race was manipulated in our study, such that half of the resumes had a White sounding name (Peter Anderson) and half had a Black sounding name (Antwan Booker). We coded race as equal to one for the resumes that had a Black sounding name and zero otherwise. We include race in all of our analyses as a control (Pager and Quillian, 2005). We found that including or excluding it did not alter the results.

Data analyses

We tested our hypotheses using a combination of multivariate analyses, regression and structural equation modeling. First, to examine whether criminal record status influences perceptions of warmth and competence (H1a and H1b), we conducted a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA). Second, to assess whether warmth and competence predict hiring intentions (H2a and H2b), we estimated an ordinary least squares regression with robust standard errors. The first two hypotheses were analyzed in STATA SE 16.1. Third, to test whether disclosure strategy indirectly affects hiring intentions through warmth and competence among applicants with a criminal record (H3a and H3b), we estimated a mediation model using structural equation modeling with maximum likelihood estimation and 10,000 bootstrap samples. Finally, to test the proposed moderated mediation involving disclosure strategy, controllability and disclosure source (H4a and H4b), we estimated a structural equation model with a three-way interaction specified at the first stage of the model and evaluated conditional indirect effects using bootstrapping (10,000 samples). The last two hypotheses were analyzed in Mplus8.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables are shown in Table 1. H1a and H1b examined the effect of criminal record on perceptions of warmth and competence and the

Table 1. Summary statistics and correlations

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Applicant race ^a	0.50	0.50	–						
2. Criminal record ^b	0.88	0.32	–	–					
3. Disclosure strategy ^c	0.50	0.50	–	–	–				
4. Controllability ^d	0.48	0.50	–	–	–	–			
5. Disclosure source ^e	0.50	0.50	–	–	–	–	–		
6. Warmth	3.75	0.73	0.02	–0.24***	0.07	–0.14***	0.25***	–	
7. Competence	3.73	0.74	0.01	–0.21***	0.11*	–0.10*	0.19***	0.85***	–
8. Hiring intentions	3.78	1.03	0.04	–0.23***	0.05	–0.11*	0.17***	0.64***	0.62***

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$, ^a0 = White and 1 = Black, ^b0 = no criminal record and 1 = criminal record, ^c0 = integration and 1 = decategorization, ^d0 = low and 1 = high, ^e0 = professional reference and 1 = applicant. Number of observations for hiring intentions is 464; applicant race, criminal record, warmth and competence is 465; and disclosure strategy, controllability and disclosure source is 410

Source(s): Authors' own work

overall model was significant (Wilk's $\lambda = 0.94$, $F(4, 922) = 7.19$, $p < 0.001$). There was a significant multivariate effect of criminal record on perceptions of warmth and competence (Wilk's $\lambda = 0.94$, $F(2, 461) = 14.29$, $p < 0.001$). Post-hoc analyses using the margins, `dydx()` command in STATA SE 16.1 provided predicted values for perceived warmth and competence by criminal record status. For applicants without a criminal record, the predicted warmth rating was 4.23 (95% CI [4.04, 4.42]), whereas those with a criminal record had a predicted rating of 3.69 (95% CI [3.62, 3.76]) and the difference in predicted warmth ratings between the two groups was significant (difference = -0.54 (95% CI [-0.74 , -0.34], $t = -5.33$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, applicants with a criminal record had lower predicted ratings of competence (predicted value = 3.68, 95% CI [3.61, 3.74]) than applicants without a criminal record (predicted value = 4.16, 95% CI [3.97, 4.35]) with this difference being significant (difference = -0.49 , 95% CI [-0.69 , -0.29], $t = -4.73$, $p < 0.001$). To further understand these findings, separate univariate ANOVAs were conducted. The results indicated that criminal record status had a significant effect on both warmth ($F(2, 465) = 14.37$, $p < 0.001$) and competence ($F(2, 465) = 11.18$, $p < 0.001$). Overall, job applicants with a criminal record are perceived as significantly less warm and competent than those without a criminal record, supporting H1a and H1b.

H2a and H2b stated that warmth and competence are positively related to hiring intentions. The results of our regression analysis ($F(3, 460) = 136.03$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.43$) indicated that both perceived warmth ($b = 0.60$, $p < 0.001$) and competence ($b = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$) were significant and positive predictors of hiring intentions. Thus, job applicants perceived as higher on warmth or competence are more likely to experience greater hiring intentions, which supports H2a and H2b.

H3a and H3b predicted that among applicants with a criminal record, those using a decategorization vs an integration strategy will receive higher ratings on warmth and competence, leading to increased hiring intentions. Given the high correlation between warmth and competence ($r = 0.85$, $p < 0.001$), we allowed the residuals of these mediators to covary in our structural equation model. Our model was fully saturated, which means we had as many estimated parameters as there were degrees of freedom, resulting in a perfect fit to the data. The chi-square test of model fit indicated no misfit, and other fit indices also suggested a perfect fit (e.g. CFI/TLI = 1.000, SRMR = 0.00). The estimates of the model are shown in Figure 1 and results indicated that the direct effect of decategorization on hiring intentions was non-significant ($b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = 0.90$). Although decategorization did not significantly affect warmth ($b = 0.11$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = 0.14$), warmth had a significant effect on hiring intentions ($b = 0.57$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < 0.001$). Decategorization had a significant positive

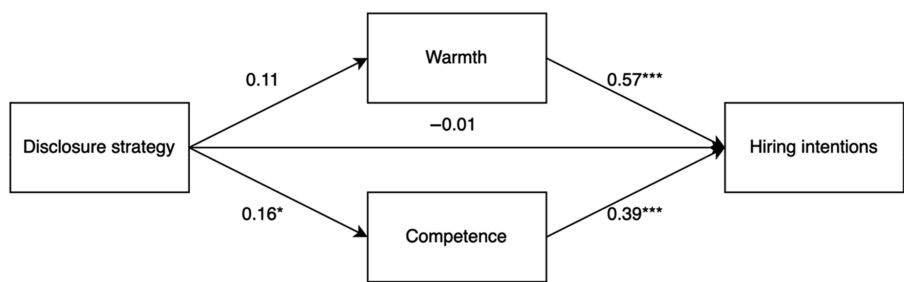


Figure 1. Path model of indirect effect of disclosure strategy on hiring intentions through warmth and competence. Note. Disclosure strategy is coded as 0 = integration and 1 = decategorization. Applicant race is included as a control variable, * $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$. Source: Authors' own work

effect on competence ($b = 0.16$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = 0.02$), and competence, in turn, had a significant positive effect on hiring intentions ($b = 0.39$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect of decategorization on hiring intentions through competence approached significance ($b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = 0.065$), suggesting a potential mediation pathway. In sum, we did not find support for H3a, and we found marginal support for H3b.

H4a and H4b predicted a three-way interaction effect between disclosure strategy, controllability and source of disclosure on warmth and competence perceptions, and, in turn, hiring intentions. The structural equation model fits the data well ($\chi^2(27) = 775.36$, comparative fit index = 0.998, root mean square error of approximation = 0.03 and standardized root mean square residual = 0.009). Results (see Figure 2) indicated that the three-way interaction was not significant on warmth ($b = -0.35$, $SE = 0.28$, $p = 0.207$) but that it was significant on competence ($b = -0.57$, $SE = 0.28$, $p = 0.044$). We plotted the interaction in Figure 3 at the two values of the moderators (0 and 1) and found that the positive relationship between decategorization and hiring intentions via competence was significant when controllability was low and the source of disclosure was the applicant (conditional indirect effect = 0.11, $p = 0.038$). Thus, decategorization (vs integration) is more likely to enhance perceived competence and subsequent hiring intentions when job applicants are not

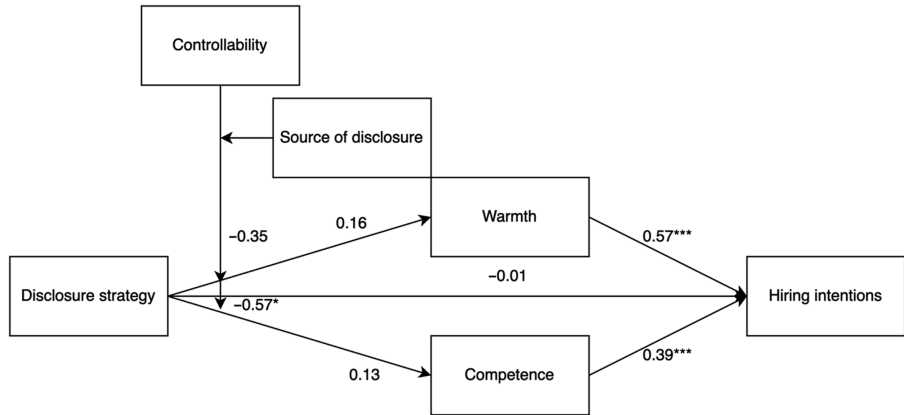


Figure 2. Path model of three-way interaction of disclosure strategy, controllability and source of disclosure on hiring intentions through warmth and competence. Note. Disclosure strategy is coded as 0 = integration and 1 = decategorization, controllability is coded as 0 = low controllability and 1 = high controllability, and source of disclosure is coded as 0 = professional reference and 1 = applicant. Applicant race is included as a control variable, * $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$. Source: Authors' own work

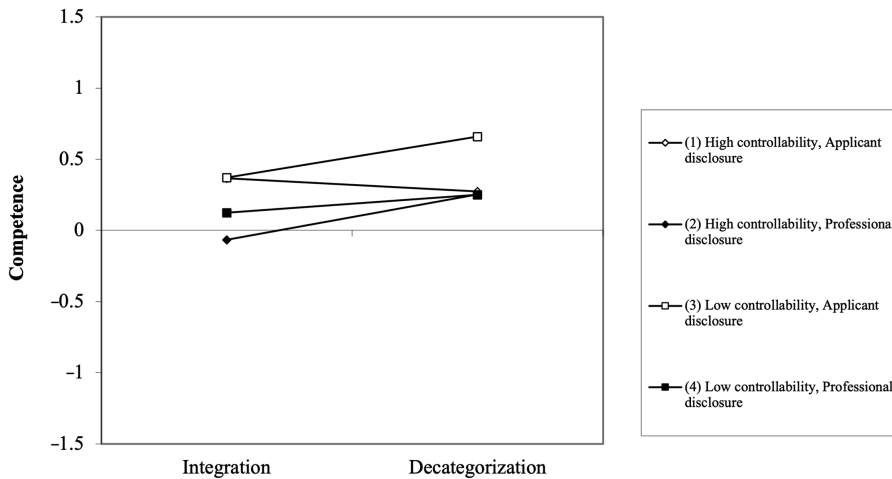


Figure 3. Three-way interaction of disclosure strategy, controllability and source of disclosure on competence perceptions. Note. Conditional indirect effect for Line 3 when controllability was low and the source of disclosure was the applicant = 0.11, $p = 0.038$. Source: Authors' own work

seen as responsible for their criminal record and when they self-disclose. All the other combinations of the two moderators produced insignificant conditional indirect effects. These findings provide support for [H4b](#) and not for [H4a](#).

Discussion

Even though much evidence supports the importance of reintegrating individuals with a criminal record into the labor force for the individual, their families and society ([Graber and Zitek, 2022](#)), they often face structural exclusion and employment discrimination. Indeed, our results indicate that job applicants with a record are perceived as significantly less warm and competent than applicants without a record and that these negative stereotypes translate into lower hiring intentions. To remedy this predicament, we sought to identify how job applicants can effectively disclose their criminal record to reduce bias and enhance their likelihood of securing employment. Our results indicate that decategorization (vs integration) enhanced perceptions of competence and subsequent hiring intentions for job applicants with a criminal record. However, this mediated relationship was only significant when job applicants were perceived as having little control over the occurrence of their criminal record and when they self-disclosed. These findings advance theory and the DEI literature on the disclosure of concealable stigmas in several ways.

First, we advocate for the inclusion of individuals with a criminal record as a diversity category in DEI programs. One in three adults in the United States has a record, and these numbers disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous and Hispanic men ([Carson and Kluckow, 2023](#)), and thus intersects with traditionally acknowledged diversity categories. Also, a criminal record is different from other concealable stigmas because it represents a structurally imposed stigma due to racialized policing, sentencing disparities and unequal access to legal representation and record expungement and it creates unique barriers to employment such as automatic exclusion policies, occupational licensing restrictions, compulsory disclosure due to background checks and a lack of legal protections during the hiring process despite the emphasis on inclusive hiring practices ([Korzenik, 2021](#)). Thus, a criminal record is a distinct diversity category that warrants its own research stream ([Gardner et al., 2023](#)) as we may not be able to apply current theories or generalize past findings on other concealable stigmas to it.

Second, we tested the efficacy of two disclosure strategies for revealing a criminal record in a hiring context and, unlike past research (e.g. [Lyons et al., 2017](#)), we found that decategorization (i.e. downplaying the criminal record and emphasizing a more positive identity) is more effective than integration (i.e. highlighting the positive features of having a criminal record). Generalizing research on integration and decategorization to the pre-hire disclosure of a criminal record is presumptuous given the unique nature of this stigma. Those with a record are often forced to disclose, they do not have US federal legal protection against employment discrimination, and they experience stronger negative stereotypes than other concealable stigmas ([Baur et al., 2018](#)). Thus, we demonstrate that not all concealable stigmas are equal, and more research is needed to determine which types of stigmas each disclosure strategy works best for.

Third, although the stereotype content model ([Fiske et al., 2002](#)), BIAS map framework ([Cuddy et al., 2007](#)) and past work (e.g. [Henle et al., 2020](#)) suggest a link between job applicants' perceived warmth and competence and hiring intentions, we extend theory and advance the literature by examining disclosure strategies as an antecedent of these perceptions. Decategorization increases perceptions of competence by providing individuating information to counteract negative stereotypes associated with criminal records, which in turn enhances hiring intentions. Thus, we identify a method for job applicants to overcome appraisals of incompetence. Contrary to our hypothesis, decategorization did not improve the applicant's perceived warmth. Stereotypes of individuals with criminal records as dangerous, hostile, dishonest and untrustworthy (i.e. low in warmth) may be more difficult to overcome in the initial applicant review than those associated with competence because they are more subjective and harder to assess through written application materials. Instead, warmth stereotypes might only be altered through personal interaction with applicants who have a criminal record ([Hirschfield and Piquero, 2010](#)), which occurs later during the employment interview. Thus, future research should examine disclosure during the interview process and whether warmth perceptions can be increased during this stage.

Fourth, we also extend the stereotype content model ([Fiske et al., 2002](#)) and BIAS map framework ([Cuddy et al., 2007](#)) by simultaneously examining two boundary conditions of the relationship between disclosure strategies and warmth and competence perceptions. We show that disclosure strategies are only effective under certain circumstances with consideration given to why a crime was committed and who discloses the record. Thus, competence perceptions are only increased when the criminal record is downplayed (vs emphasizing its benefits), the crime is the product of uncontrollable situational factors (vs the applicant being personally responsible) and the applicant self-discloses the record (vs having the disclosure come from a professional reference). Taken together, our findings suggest that competence appraisals can be altered by how the criminal record is portrayed, why the crime was committed and who does the disclosure. Future research needs to examine other boundary conditions such as offering an apology when disclosing a criminal record as it may increase hiring intentions because the job applicant is perceived as remorseful ([Ali et al., 2017](#); [Gardner et al., 2023](#)).

In summary, we contribute to the literature on concealable stigmas by demonstrating that past research on one type of concealable stigma (e.g. disability; [Lyons et al., 2017](#)) may not generalize automatically to another and that more research is needed to determine which stigmas may need to be treated similarly or differently. For example, it may be difficult for individuals with stigmas viewed as dangerous (e.g. criminal record, schizophrenia, drug addiction) to enhance their warmth perceptions through disclosure, whereas individuals with stigmas viewed as harmless (e.g. mild depression, dyslexia, diabetes) may have an easier time increasing how warmly they are perceived. This implies that concealable stigmas are not interchangeable and that they might require unique disclosure strategies which may only be effective under certain circumstances.

Practical implications

Our findings have implications for job applicants with a criminal record and organizations. First, we recommend that job applicants avoid highlighting the positive features of a criminal record (e.g. can overcome challenges, has resiliency) and instead downplay the record and focus on other more positive identities such as being a dedicated employee, student or volunteer. Applicants should consider distancing themselves from their criminal record, showing how they are no longer the person they were when the crime was committed, and establishing a new, respectful identity. Second, we suggest that applicants emphasize any situational factors that contributed to their criminal record, like limited educational or job opportunities, poverty or unstable family situations (if these conditions are true), to reduce the extent that they are seen as personally responsible. Pointing out extenuating circumstances and showing that the situation was outside of their control will enhance competence perceptions and hiring intentions. Third, we propose that applicants control the narrative by personally disclosing their criminal record instead of relying on professional references to do so. Taking this initiative will signal to recruiters that they are forthcoming, honest, and secure, which will enhance perceived competence. By managing their disclosure, applicants can also highlight activities that enhance their competence (e.g. internships, apprenticeships, certifications, earning a degree).

The burden of combatting discrimination should not be placed solely on job applicants. Ideally, we advise organizations to redesign their hiring practices to be more inclusive of applicants with a criminal record. For example, JPMorgan Chase does not ask about criminal records on the application form so that recruiters and hiring managers do not know if an applicant has a record at any point during the selection process (Maurer, 2024). Background checks are not completed until after a conditional job offer has been made and if a record is discovered, an individualized assessment is conducted by a separate screening group. This assessment considers the specific circumstances of the crime and whether it is job-related, time since the conviction, rehabilitation and regulatory requirements of the job. We also propose that hiring managers' biases and applicants' felt need to disclose a criminal record can be precluded by advertising that the company is a second chance employer, does not require the disclosure of a record until a job offer is made and will have an independent committee determine the relevance of the conviction.

Limitations and future research

We simulated a realistic hiring context by asking participants to assume the role of a recruiter and providing them with a job description and applicant materials. Additionally, participants had hiring experience and were recently involved in a hiring decision. Methodological realism helps ensure that our findings translate to the hiring context. Nevertheless, our design might be somewhat limited by using fictional job applicants. Future research could employ an experimental audit methodology in which matched pairs of individuals apply to actual jobs to see if they are treated differently by prospective employers based on the presence or absence of a criminal record (Pager, 2003; Pager and Quillian, 2005).

Our study acknowledges the importance of intersectionality and that discrimination against job applicants with a criminal record may be intensified by race. Although we manipulated applicant race, race did not affect our results. A recent study acknowledged the difficulties in using "White sounding" and "Black sounding" names to manipulate race (Obenauer, 2023). Even though we pilot tested our names, it is possible that social desirability bias played a role. Research has shown that survey results indicate no difference among hiring managers in the likelihood of hiring Black vs White ex-offenders, but that decisions in actual hiring situations show large differences by race (Pager and Quillian, 2005). Future research should consider actual hiring decisions or using the Bayesian Truth Serum (e.g. Nagtegaal *et al.*, 2026), which is a scoring method designed to combat social desirability and to elicit honest responding.

Lastly, future studies could include additional races as well as gender to continue exploring the intersectionality of criminal records.

As the results of our study and past research (e.g. [Agan and Starr, 2017](#); [Pager, 2003](#)) indicate, access discrimination (discrimination that takes place pre-hire) is common among this population. It is important to start by studying access discrimination because it must be overcome to obtain employment. However, discrimination may also occur post-hire (treatment discrimination). Employees with a criminal record may be perceived negatively by their managers, coworkers and customers, which may derail their advancement within the organization. Future research should investigate the extent to which employees with a record are evaluated negatively post-hire (e.g. retention, developmental opportunities, performance evaluations, promotions, raises).

Past research has not examined the role disclosure source plays in hiring individuals with a criminal record even though popular press books call for using professional references to negate criminal status. Although a professional reference might be more credible than a job applicant, we found that relying on others to disclose a criminal record ultimately hurts job applicants because they are seen as less competent. However, it would be interesting to explore the combined effects of these sources. Having both the applicant and a professional reference address the criminal record might further boost competence perceptions. Future research should examine this possibility.

Conclusion

Despite ongoing labor shortages, the 650,000 individuals who are released from prison annually in the United States and are eager to obtain employment, face significant barriers. By discounting this labor pool, organizations are missing out on valuable talent. To address this issue, we identified key components of an effective disclosure for job applicants with a criminal record. We discovered that not only does “how” the criminal record is framed matter (downplay it), but “who” does the disclosing (the applicant) and “why” a crime happened (uncontrollable situational factors) are also critical. When these key components are present, applicants with a criminal record have a greater chance of overcoming discrimination and obtaining employment.

Acknowledgments

Research assistance for this project was provided by the Business for a Better World Undergraduate Research Fellows Program in the College of Business at Colorado State University.

Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

References

- Agan, A. and Starr, S. (2017), “The effect of criminal records on access to employment”, *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 107 No. 5, pp. 560-564, doi: [10.1257/aer.p20171003](https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.p20171003).
- Ali, A.A., Lyons, B.J. and Ryan, A.M. (2017), “Managing a perilous stigma: ex-offenders’ use of reparative impression management tactics in hiring contexts”, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 102 No. 9, pp. 1271-1285, doi: [10.1037/apl0000226](https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000226).
- Barth, S.E. and Wessel, J.L. (2022), “Mental illness disclosure in organizations: defining and predicting (un) supportive responses”, *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 37 No. 2, pp. 407-428, doi: [10.1007/s10869-021-09753-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-021-09753-4).
- Baur, J.E., Hall, A.V., Daniels, S.R., Buckley, M.R. and Anderson, H.J. (2018), “Beyond banning the box: a conceptual model of stigmatization of ex-offenders in the workplace”, *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 204-219, doi: [10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.08.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.08.002).

- Bertrand, M. and Mullainathan, S. (2004), "Are Emily and Greg more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination", *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 94 No. 4, pp. 991-1013, doi: [10.1257/0002828042002561](https://doi.org/10.1257/0002828042002561).
- Blessett, B. and Pryor, M. (2013), "The invisible job seeker: the absence of ex-offenders in discussions of diversity management", *Public Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 37, pp. 433-455.
- Bordieri, J.E. and Drehmer, D.E. (1986), "Hiring decisions for disabled workers: looking at the cause", *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 197-208, doi: [10.1111/j.1559-1816.1986.tb01135.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1986.tb01135.x).
- Braman, D. (2004), *Doing Time on the Outside: Incarceration and Family Life in Urban America*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI.
- Bryant-Lees, K.B. and Kite, M.E. (2021), "Evaluations of LGBT job applicants: consequences of applying 'out'", *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, Vol. 40 No. 7, pp. 874-891, doi: [10.1108/edi-01-2019-0048](https://doi.org/10.1108/edi-01-2019-0048).
- Carson, E.A. and Kluckow, R. (2023), *Prisoners in 2022 – Statistical Tables*, Bureau of Justice Statistics, available at: <https://bjs.ojp.gov/document/p22st.pdf>
- Clair, J.A., Beatty, J.E. and MacLean, T.L. (2005), "Out of sight but not out of mind: managing invisible social identities in the workplace", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 30 No. 1, pp. 78-95, doi: [10.5465/amr.2005.15281431](https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2005.15281431).
- Couloute, L. and Kopf, D. (2018), "Out of prison and out of work: unemployment among formerly incarcerated people", available at: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/outofwork.html>
- Crocker, J., Major, B. and Steele, C. (1998), "Social stigma", in *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, 4th ed., McGraw-Hill, pp. 504-553.
- Cuddy, A.J.C., Fiske, S.T. and Glick, P. (2007), "The BIAS map: behaviors from intergroup affect and stereotypes", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 92 No. 4, pp. 631-648, doi: [10.1037/0022-3514.92.4.631](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.4.631).
- Drevno, M. (2014), *Jails to Jobs: Seven Steps to Becoming Employed*, Jails to Jobs, Lafayette, CA.
- Fiske, S.T. and Neuberg, S.L. (1990), "A continuum of impression formation, from category-based to individuating processes: influences of information and motivation on attention and interpretation", in Zanna, M.P. (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 23, pp. 1-71.
- Fiske, S.T., Cuddy, A.J.C., Glick, P. and Xu, J. (2002), "A model of (often mixed) stereotype content: competence and warmth respectively follow from perceived status and competition", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 82 No. 6, pp. 878-902, doi: [10.1037/0022-3514.82.6.878](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.82.6.878).
- Gardner, D.M., Ali, A.A. and Ryan, A.M. (2023), "Reparative impression management for ex-offender applicants: understanding mechanisms, race/ethnicity, and disclosure timing", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 38 No. 3, pp. 561-587, doi: [10.1007/s10869-023-09880-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-023-09880-0).
- Goffman, E. (1963), *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Graber, J. and Zitek, E.M. (2022), "Reducing criminal record discrimination through banning the box: the importance of timing and explanation in the reveal of a drug conviction", *Psychology, Crime and Law*, Vol. 28 No. 4, pp. 390-415, doi: [10.1080/1068316x.2021.1909018](https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316x.2021.1909018).
- Graffam, J., Shinkfield, A.J. and Hardcastle, L. (2008), "The perceived employability of ex-prisoners and offenders", *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, Vol. 52 No. 6, pp. 673-685, doi: [10.1177/0306624x07307783](https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624x07307783).
- Griffith, J.N. and Young, N.C.J. (2017), "Hiring ex-offenders? The case of ban the box", *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, Vol. 36 No. 6, pp. 501-518, doi: [10.1108/edi-04-2017-0066](https://doi.org/10.1108/edi-04-2017-0066).
- Hebl, M.R. and Kleck, R.E. (2002), "Acknowledging one's stigma in the interview setting: effective strategy or liability?", *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 32 No. 2, pp. 223-249, doi: [10.1111/j.1559-1816.2002.tb00214.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2002.tb00214.x).

- Henle, C.A., Fisher, G., McCarthy, J., Prince, M.A., Mattingly, V. and Clancy, R.L. (2020), "Eldercare and childcare: how does caregiving responsibility affect job discrimination?", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 35 No. 1, pp. 59-83, doi: [10.1007/s10869-019-09618-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-019-09618-x).
- Hirschfield, P.J. and Piquero, A.R. (2010), "Normalization and legitimation: modeling stigmatizing attitudes toward ex-offenders", *Criminology*, Vol. 48 No. 1, pp. 27-55, doi: [10.1111/j.1745-9125.2010.00179.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2010.00179.x).
- Jones, K.P. and King, E.B. (2014), "Managing concealable stigmas at work: a review and multilevel model", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 40 No. 5, pp. 1466-1494, doi: [10.1177/0149206313515518](https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206313515518).
- Johnson, T.D. and Joshi, A. (2016), "Dark clouds or silver linings? A stigma threat perspective on the implications of an autism diagnosis for workplace well-being", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 101 No. 3, pp. 430-449, doi: [10.1037/apl0000058](https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000058).
- Jones, E.E., Farina, A., Hastorf, A.H., Markus, H., Miller, D.T. and Scott, R.A. (1984), *Social Stigma: The Psychology of Marked Relationships*, W. H. Freeman and Company, New York, NY.
- Korzenik, J.D. (2021), *Untapped Talent*, HarperCollins Leadership.
- LeBel, T.P. (2012), "Invisible stripes? Formerly incarcerated persons' perceptions of stigma", *Deviant Behavior*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 89-107, doi: [10.1080/01639625.2010.538365](https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2010.538365).
- Link, B.G. and Phelan, J.C. (2001), "Conceptualizing stigma", *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 363-385, doi: [10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.363](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.363).
- Lundquist, J.H., Pager, D. and Strader, E. (2018), "Does a criminal past predict worker performance? Evidence from one of America's largest employers", *Social Forces*, Vol. 96 No. 3, pp. 1039-1068, doi: [10.1093/sf/sox092](https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sox092).
- Lynch, J.W. and Rodell, J.B. (2018), "Blend in or stand out? Interpersonal outcomes of managing concealable stigmas at work", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 103 No. 12, pp. 1307-1323, doi: [10.1037/apl0000342](https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000342).
- Lyons, B.J., Volpone, S.D., Wessel, J.L. and Alonso, N.M. (2017), "Disclosing a disability: do strategy type and onset controllability make a difference?", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 102 No. 9, pp. 1375-1383, doi: [10.1037/apl0000230](https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000230).
- Lyons, B.J., Martinez, L.R., Ruggs, E.N., Hebl, M.R., Ryan, A.M., O'Brien, K.R. and Roebuck, A. (2018), "To say or not to say: different strategies of acknowledging a visible disability", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 44 No. 5, pp. 1980-2007, doi: [10.1177/0149206316638160](https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316638160).
- Maurer, R. (2024), "Unlocking potential", *HR Quarterly*, Vol. 69 No. 3, pp. 42-47.
- Nagtegaal, R., de Boer, N. and Tummers, L. (2026), "Discrimination against people with disabilities in hiring and strategies to reduce it: evidence from resumes", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, pp. 1-15, doi: [10.1002/job.70050](https://doi.org/10.1002/job.70050).
- Obenauer, W.G. (2023), "More on why Lakisha and Jamal didn't get interviews: extending previous findings through a reproducibility study", *Journal of Management Scientific Reports*, Vol. 1 No. 2, pp. 114-145, doi: [10.1177/27550311231167366](https://doi.org/10.1177/27550311231167366).
- Office of Disability Employment Policy (2026), "Disability employment statistics", available at: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/research-evaluation/statistics>
- Pager, D. (2003), "The mark of a criminal record", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 108 No. 5, pp. 937-975, doi: [10.1086/374403](https://doi.org/10.1086/374403).
- Pager, D. and Quillian, L. (2005), "Walking the talk? What employers say versus what they do", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 70 No. 3, pp. 355-380, doi: [10.1177/000312240507000301](https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240507000301).
- Pager, D., Western, B. and Sugie, N. (2009), "Sequencing disadvantage: barriers to employment facing young black and white men with criminal records", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 623 No. 1, pp. 195-213, doi: [10.1177/0002716208330793](https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716208330793).

- Ragins, B.R., Singh, R. and Cornwell, J.M. (2007), "Making the invisible visible: fear and disclosure of sexual orientation at work", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 92 No. 4, pp. 1103-1118, doi: [10.1037/0021-9010.92.4.1103](https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.92.4.1103).
- Rivera, L.A. and Tilcsik, A. (2016), "Class advantage, commitment penalty: the gendered effect of social class signals in an elite labor market", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 81 No. 6, pp. 1097-1131, doi: [10.1177/0003122416668154](https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122416668154).
- Roberts, L.M. (2005), "Changing faces: professional image construction in diverse organizational settings", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 685-711, doi: [10.5465/amr.2005.18378873](https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2005.18378873).
- Ruggs, E.N. and McGonagle, A.K. (2023), "Can brief video trainings reduce bias and improve knowledge and attitudes toward applicants with disabilities?", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 38 No. 2, pp. 305-326, doi: [10.1007/s10869-022-09857-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-022-09857-5).
- Santuzzi, A.M., Waltz, P.R., Finkelstein, L.M. and Rupp, D.E. (2014), "Invisible disabilities: unique challenges for employees and organizations", *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 204-219, doi: [10.1111/iops.12134](https://doi.org/10.1111/iops.12134).
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2026), "Labor force statistics from the current population survey", available at: [E-16. Unemployment rates by age, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity](#)
- Western, B. and Sirois, C. (2019), "Racialized re-entry: labor market inequality after incarceration", *Social Forces*, Vol. 97 No. 4, pp. 1517-1542, doi: [10.1093/sf/soy096](https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soy096).
- Young, N.C.J. and Powell, G.N. (2005), "Hiring ex-offenders: a theoretical model", *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 25, pp. 298-312.

Corresponding author

Christine Henle can be contacted at: chris.henle@colostate.edu