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Evaluation of Ph.D. Dissertation “Essays in Experimental Economics: Labor Market Discrimination,” by Daviti Jibuti

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I have been asked to evaluate whether this dissertation is acceptable for the Ph.D. degree and whether the student should be granted a Ph.D. defense. Let me state first that my general rule for approving a Ph.D. dissertation: There should be something in it that is novel and that, with some additional work, would be publishable in a scholarly journal that is at least slightly reputable. With that criterion in mind, I have gone over the three substantive chapters of this thesis. Let me comment on them in order.

Chapter 1 describes a correspondence study in which hiring managers in the German banking sector were presented with fake resumés that were otherwise identical except that in some cases the job candidates had tattoos while in others they did not. Jibuti also varied the amount of information on workers’ potential productivity and found regardless that tattooed “workers” were less likely to receive call-backs from employers. He quantifies the extent of the difference between those workers and others, and examines how the provision of information affects that difference. Chapter 2 engages in an essentially identical exercise, except using the example of the German IT sector. Despite the difference from the environment used in the exercise in Chapter 1, the raw differences, without focus on information provision, are similar. Information provision does not affect the results greatly. As with the exercise in Chapter 1, the study is conducted carefully and contains all the usual tests for believability in this type of research.

There is little more specific that can be done to improve the bulk of the research in these two chapters. It is quite standard, with correspondence and many other studies by earlier researchers on the role of tattoos in the labor market. Most of the material in these chapters is not publishable and would not justify granting a Ph.D. degree.

There is, however, one novelty in Chapter 1 (Table 3) which, with some elaboration and extension, could be developed into a very nice publishable paper. The entire vast correspondence literature

considers inter-group differences in rates of call-backs by employers. To my knowledge, however, no other study examined the speed at which employers reacted to the fake resumés of different groups. That it takes employers longer to react positively to minority (in this case, tattooed) workers' resumés than others' is interesting and publishable. Such a published paper would be enhanced if the author would perform the same analysis on the data in Chapter 2. A revision of Chapter 2 that added this analysis should be done before the dissertation is accepted (with the caveat that the author has, or can develop the requisite data).

Chapter 3 is an 8-authored evaluation of online subjects' expressed willingness to hire workers of different characteristics. The study examines how differences in the provision of information about the workers' abilities alter differences in "employers'" hiring behavior between groups that differ by gender, race/ethnicity, or physical attractiveness. Most of this has been done many times before in online experiments to evaluate a wide variety of interpersonal differences. There is, however, as the authors note, a novel wrinkle in this study, one that ties nicely to prior formal theory produced by other researchers: The issue is how these inter-group differences in hiring preferences are affected by the number of people in the hiring pool, a difference in the experimental treatments that is the third focus of the chapter.

As with Chapter 1, and unlike Chapter 2, I can see little specific to be done that would improve Chapter 3. Here too, though, the authors could write a nice note that stresses the novel result and that analyzes it in further detail. Such an extension would, I think, be publishable.

Overall, the dissertation is ready for a defense. It passes, albeit marginally, my criteria for an acceptable Ph.D. dissertation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Daniel S. Hamermesh". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail.

Daniel S. Hamermesh