

THE IDEAL TEMPORARY EMPLOYEE: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF
RECRUITERS' PERCEPTIONS WITHIN TEMPORARY STAFFING AGENCIES

by

Kimberly Kraemer, B.S.

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Committee Members:

Patti Giuffre, Chair

David Dietrich

Tom Grimes

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ABSTRACT

Temporary staffing agencies have been offering U.S. employers alternative employment arrangements for several decades. Researchers have examined the implications of these arrangements by exploring temporary workers themselves. Yet, few studies have explored these arrangements from the agencies' perspective. In this qualitative study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with recruiters who work in temporary staffing agencies to explore their perceptions of who makes a good potential temporary employee and whether their beliefs are shaped by racial, gender, or other stereotypes. Utilizing Joan Acker's theory of gendered organizations, this study also explores how temporary agency recruiters describe the ideal temporary employee. The findings showed that temporary agency recruiters have stereotyped beliefs and biases that shape their conception of "good potential temporary employees." In addition, recruiters and their clients had gendered beliefs about particular occupations which influenced how they described the ideal temporary employee.

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of the workforce is an evolving research topic within the field of sociology. According to Kalleberg (2009) over the past 40 years, work in the U.S. has become more precarious. Precarious work is employment that is uncertain, insecure, unpredictable, and risky from the perspective of the worker (Kalleberg 2009). Precarious work is often associated with contingent work arrangements such as part-time work, temporary employment, self-employment, and outsourcing (Kunda, Barley, and Evans 2002). Sociologists have contributed to the understanding of contingent work arrangements and the implications for workers within these arrangements. Existing research has shown there is a growing number of differences between contingent workers and standard traditional employees. Some of the documented differences include less pay, fewer benefits, and a lack of security (Connelly and Gallagher 2004; Kalleberg 2009; Kunda, Barley, and Evans 2002) for contingent workers. These differences show what little power they have in comparison to standard employees.

Temporary employment arrangements epitomize precariousness. According to Hatton (2011), temporary arrangements were not always favored employment practices. The rise of the temporary industry stemmed from its ability to take advantage of cultural politics and harsh economic climates (Hatton 2011). In the 1950s, temporary agencies strategically advertised temporary work as “women’s work” to mask ambivalence. These temporary agencies played a direct role in corporate restructuring by creating a two-tiered workforce consisting of permanent and temporary workers (Hatton 2011). By the 1980s, temporary work had become a normative work status in the American economy.

The rise of precarious work has contributed to various forms of inequality.

According to Acker (2006), gender, class, and racial inequalities are embedded in organizations. Additionally, some organizational practices and processes have created and re-created these inequalities. For instance, during the recruitment and hiring process, U.S. employers legally cannot recruit or base their hiring decisions on stereotypes and assumptions about a candidate's protected characteristics. Despite continued efforts to practice equality, sociologists have documented that preferences to hire based on race (Moss and Tilly 2001), gender (Gorman 2005), and age (Roscigno et al. 2007) is still rampant in many workplaces.

Because temporary agencies provide recruiting services to organizations, their hiring process and practices to hire ideal candidates may be similar. There are two studies that have documented unequal hiring and recruitment practices in temporary agencies. One study showed that managers in temporary agencies had stereotypical views and their clients had racial biases when hiring temporary workers (Peck and Theodore 2001). The other more recent study suggested that hiring practices of temporary agencies are legitimate and temporary staff are advocates for helping temporary employees (Smith and Neuwirth 2008). The findings of these two studies are conflicting and need to be re-explored.

In this thesis research, I provide an analysis of the growing body of literature pertaining to the study of contingent work arrangements. Most of the research on contingent labor has focused on experiences of temporary workers themselves. Temporary workers have described their onsite job experience, their relationships with their temporary agency, and have highlighted differences in comparison to standard traditional employees. Yet, temporary employees have provided few insights of the hiring

process within temporary agencies. I will focus on the role of recruiters within temporary employment agencies. Recruiters of temporary agencies have the role of screening and selecting job applicants for temporary employment opportunities. Therefore, recruiters play a key role in who is hired, and why. Research within traditional employment arrangements have concluded that employers rely on stereotypes and have unconscious and conscious biases when they hire new employees. Both recruiters and employers use screening and selection processes. In contrast to employers, recruiters within temporary employment agencies have a unique role in hiring because they are initially the first people to interact with job applicants and have control in who is selected to work for their clients.

Few studies have explored experiences and perceptions of recruiters who work in temporary staffing agencies. Only one study has explored temporary agency staff recruiters. Smith and Neuwirth (2008) explored experiences and perceptions of all agency staff and missed details from recruiters themselves. My research adds to the existing literature by exploring the experiences of temporary agency recruiters. This study also fills a gap in the literature by examining whether recruiter practices or beliefs create inequalities during the hiring process. I conducted in-depth face to face interviews with temporary agency recruiters in order to explore the following research questions: How do recruiters talk about and construct “good potential employees”? Are recruiters’ beliefs about who makes a good employee shaped by racial, gender, or other stereotypes? How do recruiters describe ideal temporary employees? I will argue that temporary agency recruiters have stereotypical beliefs and practices that control hiring decisions. Temporary agency work was once feminized and racialized (Hatton 2011). Therefore,

deeply rooted ideas are still internally present in temporary hiring practices. Recruiters in this study changed their idea of “good potential temporary employees” when they described their clients’ beliefs about ideal temporary employees. When recruiters change their beliefs to cater to their client’s beliefs, they lose control of who is hired. The findings of this study will add additional insights into how organizational practices of temporary agencies reproduce inequalities in workplaces (Acker 2006). Additionally, this study can demonstrate how temporary agencies’ power and resources are challenged by clients.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Contingent work arrangements

A contingent work arrangement “implies that the employment relationship is conditional on some other factor, such as time” or the contingent employee is being paid by a third party employer (Pedulla 2013: 693). Some researchers have described these types of arrangements as nonstandard (Kalleberg 2000). There are now multiple types of work arrangements that are different from traditional, standard, permanent full-time positions. Researchers have differentiated these work arrangements into two segments, primary and secondary (Kalleberg 2000; Kunda, Barley and Evans 2002; Padavic 2005). Primary arrangements consist of traditional standard jobs that have benefits, job security, career growth, and high wages. In contrast, secondary work arrangements include contingent jobs that are characterized by less job stability, low wages, and no health insurance or retirement benefits (Kunda, Barley, and Evans 2002). Research has shown that primary and secondary segments have transparent differences that are marked by in pay, benefits, and job security. Some less transparent differences suggest that contingent workers have more or less job satisfaction, motivation, commitment, work and family conflict, and performance (Connelly and Gallagher 2004). Within the contingent industry, there are layers of different types of work arrangements. Kunda, Barley, and Evans (2002) find that these layers consist of primary and secondary sectors and the differences are significant. Recent research has acknowledged the complexity of these layers and have been more attentive to the variation of contingent work arrangements

(Pedulla 2013). Different types of contingent work include a wide array of short-term arrangements including, part-time work, self-employment, homebased work, temporary work, contracting, and outsourcing (Kunda, Barley, and Evans 2002). Although there has been a wide range of studies that have specifically explored temporary work, there are areas that need to be reexamined.

History of temporary work

In the late 1960s through the 1970s, the United States witnessed an economic shift. This shift caused American businesses to compete globally (Hatton 2011). In the beginning of this global competition American business leaders were blindsided by the emergence of international trade. For the first time, all major industrialized countries between the years of 1969 and 1979 were trading and producing the same products (Harrison and Bluestone 1990). The unit increase of production for American businesses was on the rise and during this time production in the U.S. had become stagnant.

As a result, American businesses were forced to restructure their way of doing business that would increase their profits to make them competitive globally. According to Harrison and Bluestone (1990), one way American business restructured was by creating more flexible arrangements with their customers and employee's subcontractors. Flexible arrangements with their employees consisted of transitioning them into contingent work arrangements. Larger businesses during this time utilized temporary employment agencies to hire new employees. Today, this type of provisional employment arrangement is known as temporary work, "a universally explicit understanding between all three parties (staffing agency-worker-client organization) that the assignment is of a fixed duration" (Connelly and Gallagher 2004:960). Some of the

large companies who utilized temporary agencies, along with the business who transitioned their current employees on part-time schedules, were able to increase their company profit and give them the opportunity needed to stay competitive.

By 1984, payrolls of temporary employment agencies had grown twice as fast as the U.S. Gross National Product (Harrison and Bluestone 1990). The increased use of temporary employment agencies may appear to be a favored business model from 1970 to 1984; however, temporary work was not always a widely accepted strategy within traditional business practices. According to Hatton (2011), some of the first employment agencies appeared in the 1930s. They were accused of taking advantage of immigrants, black southerners, and female domestic servants by underpaying workers and charging these vulnerable workers excessive fees for services. In addition, unions opposed the inclusion of temporary workers. Unions were threatened because organizations could maintain control by replacing workers that were on strike with temporary workers. As a result, many states implemented temporary agency regulations. In response, agencies masked old practices by providing assistance to female workers in low-skilled jobs that did not threaten high-skilled male breadwinning jobs. Eventually, temporary employment industry leaders strategically resold their business model with fewer regulations.

Agencies' strategic practice of selling their model of business, along with the use of temporary workers, is rooted in a gendered history. Union leaders were highly critical of temporary workers because of past experiences when employment agency workers undermined the authority of male breadwinners by employing women in place of union workers on strike (Hatton 2011). In response to criticism, temporary staffing agencies sought a new strategy that would help mask their negative reputation. The new face that

helped mask their traditional practices was formed by Kelly Girl Services, a temporary staffing agency (Hatton 2011). Kelly Girl Services strategically created their new image by focusing on impressions of gender, race, and class. The staffing agency advertised images of white, “respectful” middle-class women (Hatton 2011). Consequently, unions (which were predominately male) began to feel less threatened because temporary work was seen as women’s work instead of men’s work. The portrayal of women workers in advertisements was used in a variety of ways. Kelly Girl Services was not the only temporary staffing agency that used these marketing strategies. Different agencies advertised temporary labor by showing cultural images of gender. The use of these strategies took advantage of postwar gender politics (Hatton 2011), as well as potentially increasing gender segregation in a changing labor market.

In the 1960s through the 1970s, temporary employment agencies again utilized gendered advertisements but began to target men, particularly for male-dominated temporary work (e.g., construction work). Agencies began to portray male temporary workers in masculine occupations (Hatton 2014). Hatton found that marketing campaigns relied on occupational gender typing and beliefs about ideal temporary workers. The ideal temporary worker had a sole commitment to work, without family responsibilities. At first women were advertised to show that temporary employment was a second job for them (first job was in the home) and helped pay for extra luxuries (Hatton 2014). Then, temporary women workers were re-gendered in advertisements as “disembodied workers” to exemplify the ideal worker (Acker 2006; Hatton 2014). “Disembodied workers” were bodiless, separated from their sexuality, emotions, and ability to procreate (Acker 1990). This re-gendered image of women temporary workers without their

disruptive bodily functions enticed clients and ultimately contributed to gender inequality at work (Hatton 2014).

Hiring practices within temporary employment agencies

Temporary staffing agencies' success is not entirely framed on their strategic advertisement practices. Their business model was compelling because it provided the opportunity for their clients to save time and money by hiring flexible workers that were desirable to businesses during harsh economic times (Hatton 2011). It makes sense that American businesses might utilize their temporary agency services in contemporary workplaces because the hiring process for a standard permanent employee in the U.S. can be lengthy. Although the process varies by industry, organization, and occupation, the time frame ranges between 3-4 weeks on average, and during these three weeks, employers have multiple interviews, complete heavy amounts of paperwork, and wait for background and drug screenings to return. Once hired, some permanent employees eventually receive a benefits package that typically includes medical insurance, paid vacation, sick/personal leave, 401k plans, workers compensation, and unemployment benefits (Smith and Neuwirth 2008). Smith and Neuwirth describe the traditional length of the hiring process and benefits package as "hidden costs," which were used as selling points for temporary agencies when they discussed their services to potential clients in American businesses. Hidden costs were marketed as selling points because temporary agencies accrued these costs instead of employers.

Even though this business model seemed cost effective to American businesses, some were still leery of temporary workers. If temporary workers were not used efficiently then the use of temporary services could be costly. The "Good Temp"

described in Smith and Neuwirth (2008) addressed these concerns. Smith and Neuwirth explored the success of these “good temps” by conducting interviews with agency staff at Select Labor, a temporary staffing agency in Silicon Valley. The authors also observed agency staff and interviewed the recruiters and managers. Recruiters in temporary agencies identify and select candidates for a potential job opening for a business. The responsibility of a manager is dependent upon the agency; however, their primary responsibility is building and maintaining relationships with businesses that use temporary employees. Smith and Neuwirth sought to explore the infrastructure of how temporary employment practices became rooted in today’s economy. They found that the success of temporary agencies is a process of constructing “good, qualified temps, to build, cultivate and maintain marketable workforces” (Smith and Neuwirth 2008:116). More specifically, Select Labor had mechanisms in place that enhanced their ability to construct and retain a workforce of “good temps” (Smith and Neuwirth 2008). These mechanisms included selective recruitment, weeding out low quality temps through interviews and various skills/aptitude test, placing candidates that are the right fit for the job, and strategic personalism. Smith and Neuwirth concluded that, through robust hiring practices, temporary agencies have become normalized. More so, temporary agencies are advocates for their temporary employees despite the obligation they have for their clients.

The use of stereotypes in hiring standard employees

In traditional work arrangements, employers often look for particular set of skills and knowledge that indicate a candidate would perform the job successfully. Yet, certain hiring practices can impede some groups from career opportunities (Rivera 2012). One of these practices include screening for cultural similarities. For instance, Rivera (2012)

found that elite employers preferred to hire interviewees who had similar interest in feminine leisure activities. By including gender based leisure activities in the hiring criteria, decision makers are more likely to form implicit biases and stereotypes. When people know very little about each other, they are likely to rely on stereotypes. Stereotypes are “unconscious habits of thought that link personal attributes to group membership” (Reskin 2000), and can lead people to formulate conscious or unconscious biases. A common social situation where people know very little about each other is employment interviews. When an employer uses biases to make a hiring decision, different forms of discrimination are likely to occur. In a qualitative analysis using self-reported cases of age discrimination, Roscigno et al. (2007) found that employers’ ageist beliefs might have spurred their discriminatory actions. Employers in this study were accused of ageism during hiring and firing. The study revealed that employers preferred to hire younger workers because older workers were supposedly unable to keep pace with demands. There are different forms of ageism, such as being prejudice and discriminatory toward older people (Palmore 2001). Palmore (2001) argues that eventually everyone will become vulnerable to ageism.

Gender stereotypes (Gorman 2005) and racial biases (Moss and Tilly 2001) also shape hiring preferences. Hiring criteria that emphasize masculine stereotypes (e.g. that men are better leaders than women) influence the decision to hire men over women (Gorman 2005). In terms of racial biases, Moss and Tilly (2001) find that racial biases lessen the willingness of employers to hire black people. Several employers interviewed for the study said that they preferred to hire white workers because they “worked harder” or were “more dedicated” than workers of color.

Although previous studies have demonstrated biases toward particular groups, it is difficult for researchers to ascertain whether and when employers' biases and stereotypes become the basis for discriminatory practices. Audit studies have been a powerful tool for identifying discrimination at the point of hire (Pager 2007). In audit studies, researchers ask employers or student respondents to evaluate fictitious resumes. The resumes are identical in terms of skills, years of experience, and proficiencies; they differ subtly indicating age, gender, race, or sexual orientation of the "job applicant." For example, Lahey (2008) found that older female applicants are less likely to be offered an interview than younger female applicants. Utilizing in-person audits, Pager, Bonikowski, and Western (2009) revealed that low-wage employers had racial preferences. Employers provided more callbacks and job offers to white applicants than equally qualified black or Latino applicants. Black and Latino applicants were also steered toward lower positions that had less customer contact (Pager, Bonikowski, and Western 2009). Likewise, Rivera and Tilcsik (2016) found employers had gender preferences. Rivera and Tilcsik (2016) findings showed that elite law firm employers were less likely to callback women with higher social class resumes than men with higher-class resumes. In this case, social class was indicated in the resume by noting personal interest, extracurricular activities, and assigning upper and lower class last names. Social class can also influence decisions in hiring, Rivera and Tilcsik (2016) found that employers viewed more upper class applicants as more fit than lower-class applicants. Being perceived as part of upper social classes does not always serve as a hiring advantage. In terms of commitment to work, Rivera and Tilcsik (2016) found that being perceived as part of upper social classes served as a disadvantage for women applicants.

Sociologists recognize that some forms of discrimination are conscious, while others an unconscious process. For many job seekers, hiring discrimination is difficult to prove. Applicants are unaware whether an employer has biases, and without information on an entire applicant pool, hiring discrimination is hard to prove (Moore 2010). In the event that an applicant is discriminated against and it is known by the applicant, many cases are dismissed because it is difficult to prove an employer intended to engage in discriminatory hiring practices.

Workplace stereotypes and biases towards temporary employees

There have been great strides made in identifying unjust practices during the hiring process in traditional work arrangements, but there have been few studies that have explored whether unjust hiring practices exists in temporary employment agencies. Concurrently, past studies have shown that temporary workers do face biases. Smith (2002) found that some of the temporary workers she interviewed expressed anxiety about being viewed as a bad temporary worker by their traditional (full-time) coworkers. Further, these temporary workers described a bad temporary worker as a person who could not consistently hold a job, who did not want to work, or were untrustworthy (Smith 2002).

Research demonstrates that temporary employees are treated differently than traditional employees. Temporary employees often lack the opportunity to build professional relationships with their traditional coworkers because traditional workers presume temporary workers are not worth the investment (Rogers 1995). Temporary workers are sometimes required to make themselves identifiable in the workplace by wearing different colored badges and are excluded from social events in their workplaces

(Smith 2002). Peck and Theodore (2001) and Smith (2002) identified several unjust hiring practices in temporary agencies. Peck and Theodore's (2001) interviews with managers of temporary agencies revealed several stereotypes and biases. One manager said that most of their temporary employees are Hispanic because "people for some reason think that they are better workers" and some of their clients prefer hiring Hispanics and if you send them any other nationality "you run into problems" (Peck and Theodore 2001:488). In a more recent study, a temporary help agency disclosed that their temporary employees at a particular job site had been complaining about unjust practices at their worksite by their managers, but the temporary employment agency decided not to intervene because that company was a profitable client of theirs (Smith and Neuwirth 2008).

Numerous studies have explored unjust hiring practices within traditional employment arrangements but sociologists know little about recruiter biases during their selection process for temporary employment arrangements. Sociologists have provided an understanding of history of temporary work (Hatton 2011), temporary workers themselves (Smith 2002), and one of few studies explored perceptions of temporary agency staff more generally (Smith and Neuwirth 2008). There has not been a study that has explored how recruiters from different temporary agencies screen and select potential employees and whether their beliefs about who makes a good potential employee are shaped by gender, race, or other stereotypes.

Theoretical Frameworks

In this study, I utilize two main theoretical frameworks to understand perceptions of recruiters and recruiter biases during the hiring process: Joan Acker's theory of

inequality regimes (2006) and Peter Blau's exchange theory, and particularly, his analysis of resources and power. Joan Acker's theory of inequality regimes (2006) maintains that gender, class, and racial inequalities are produced and reproduced within certain organizational practices and processes. The theory incorporates an intersectional approach by highlighting how inequalities can occur based on race, class, gender, and other social statuses (in contrast to her earlier theory of gendered organizations) (see Acker 1990). These biases can be intentional or unintentional but the effects are nonetheless occupational segregation and wage inequalities. Inequalities are embedded within the practices of temporary agencies because agencies provide recruitment services to organizations.

Acker (2006) discussed several characteristics of inequality regimes in organizations: the basis of inequality, the shape and degree of inequality, organizational processes that create and recreate inequalities, inequality that is hidden and legitimized in organizations, and the types of controls that preserve inequality. The basis of inequality in organizations includes race, gender, and social class. As example, men and women of color have historically been excluded from highly paid jobs and from the top positions in most organizations (Acker 2006). Similarly, temporary work was seen as secondary work and some of the first temporary agency advertisements were of white, middle-class woman. These advertisements masked the ambivalence of temporary work by focusing on impressions of gender, race and class (Hatton 2014). Inequalities based in gender, social class, and race are embedded in organizations (Acker 2006).

The shape and degree of inequality can be explained by understanding hierarchies in workplaces. The image of a successful organization in the U.S. is usually represented

by white men occupying the top position. Acker (2006) explained that most workplaces are characterized by occupational sex segregation and internal job segregation. Across the economy, men and women are concentrated in different jobs, and even within the same job title, men and women concentrate in different specialties. For instance, men and women can have the same position title and be expected to perform the same type of work, but women will have different career paths and typically lower job salaries. These gender hierarchies are especially heightened in temporary work. Temporary workers can have the same occupation as traditional workers but their job security is stripped. Clients have the right to fire temporary workers at any time and without reason. This type of unstable job security impedes opportunities for advancement, making top hierarchical positions out of reach for temporary workers.

Acker (2006) argues that organizational practices and processes can create and re-create inequalities. During recruitment, employers prefer to hire workers whose sole purpose is their job. An employer's gendered beliefs can contribute to sexism in determining who can (and cannot) achieve a high level of commitment. Women are perceived by employers as less committed because they are presumed to be encumbered by family responsibilities. This type of sexist stereotype can disadvantage women in the workplace and act as an advantage for men. Temporary work has created and re-created inequalities because some of the first temporary agency advertisements showcased temporary work as exclusively women's work. They focused on presenting women who appeared to be young and single. Advertisements represented these women as "business machines" (Hatton 2014). Organizations were in favor of hiring temporary women workers because it allowed them to receive the same type of commitment and cut labor

costs.

The processes and practices of organizations that produce inequality are highly salient or seemingly subtle (Acker 2006). When inequality is visible within practices, some organizations are knowingly aware or unaware. For example, white executives and managers may not see their racial privilege, while lower minorities in non-managerial positions may be more conscious of the racial differences in job levels within the organization. There are some organizations that are aware of their inequalities, in a study by Moss and Tilly (2001) a human resource specialist from a large retail chain described that her company acknowledged that their pool of candidates was not racially diverse so they advertised in black newspapers. Organizations that have awareness, view inequality as legitimate or illegitimate. In this case, the organization viewed inequality as illegitimate and developed an affirmative action plan that would create a racially diverse workforce (Moss and Tilly 2001). In the U.S., organizations are expected to abide by Equal employment opportunity laws. Therefore, gender and race inequality are viewed by most organizations as illegitimate. According to Acker (2006) practices become legitimate when employers have gendered or racial beliefs about which workers are more suited for demanding careers. Temporary agencies took into account these beliefs and created their own marketing practices that focused on impressions of gender, race, and class (Hatton 2011). These marketing practices represented visible inequalities that were seen as legitimate practices by agencies because it allowed them to remain relevant to their clients.

Organizations exert control in order to maintain their goals. Acker (2006) briefly mentions that selective recruitment can be a kind of control. Acker describes examples of

powerless workers such as women of color because they have fewer employment opportunities and are willing to accept lower wages. Similarly, temporary workers are also viewed by their clients as powerless workers because they have fewer full-time opportunities and are willing to accept low pay. Selective recruitment can be a form of gendered control. Organizational recruitment practices such as utilizing temporary employment services could help maintain the organization's conception of ideal workers and control business outcomes to stay competitive.

The relationship between client, temporary agency, and potential temporary employee is complex. The relationship between all three parties can be better explained utilizing Blau's social exchange theory (1964) of its assumptions about power. Blau identifies two types of exchange relationships, social and economic. The differences between social and economic is the exchange of money. All three parties partake in an economic exchange. A temporary agency provides a service to a client, the client pays the agency for that service, then the temporary agency pays the temporary employee, and the temporary employee continues to get paid in exchange for their labor. The economic exchange is completed when the potential temporary employee fulfills the obligations of their employment contract.

The economic exchange between the temporary agency and client implies that they both have more hiring decision power than the potential employee. Potential temporary employees have little power in the decision of who is hired but it is less apparent whether the decision is equally shared by the client and agency. Blau's differentiation of power provides insight into recruiters' selection and hiring process. Blau (1964) states that "by supplying services in demand to others, a person establishes

power over them” (117). From this statement we could assume that power is unequal because temporary agencies are providing a service and the client is in demand of that service. Yet, when Blau (1964) explored this idea he was referring to traditional employment and organizational arrangements. Deciphering who has power is more complex in temporary employment arrangements. By further examining the hiring process of a recruiter we can better understand who has power in the hiring process and whether a recruiter’s power is shaped by the influences of others.

My analysis utilizes Blau’s four conditions of social independence. These conditions were alternatives to inevitable situations in which persons or groups become dependent upon one another. The term social independence has no relation to monetary value but instead is congruent to relationships. To be socially independent, persons cannot be reliant on relationships and they must be self-sufficient. Blau describes as the first condition of social independence as having access to sufficient resources. In the case of clients, most have adequate internal recruitment resources such as human resource personnel. The second condition is that an individual must have alternative sources available to them. In the U.S., clients have multiple options because there are many temporary agencies (at least in urban areas). Blau’s theory highlights that clients may be limited to one temporary agency because the quality of other agencies are less attractive. In the case of temporary agency recruiters, most recruiters have relationships with several clients. However, there are situations in which temporary agency recruiters have limited access to clients. Some agencies may have a small number of clients and could be struggling to increase their book of business. The third condition is the ability to use coercive force. Clients can demand the type of employee they want to hire because

they can threaten to stop using the agency's services. When clients use coercive force, some temporary agencies recruiters might become powerless because they may be reliant on that one client because it accounts for the majority of their profit. The last condition of social independence is that an individual has few wants and needs. At its core, the client is driven by their organizational goals so their needs to hire the ideal worker is pressing. Using Blau's theory, it seems that clients and temporary agency recruiters have different power relationships. Certain situations such as, geographic location, quality, and profit can influence situations in which clients or temporary agency recruiters become dependent on one another.

Taken together, Acker's theory of inequality regimes and Blau's theory on power and resources suggest that most (perhaps, all) workplaces are sites of power differences, hierarchies, and inequalities. Temporary agencies have deeply rooted practices that maintain gender, racial, and social class inequalities in workplaces. Exploring temporary recruiters' perceptions and descriptions of "good potential employees" will provide insight to contemporary temporary agency hiring practices. By discussing on the job experiences, recruiters reveal how their clients' perspective of the ideal temporary employee influenced their hiring decisions.

III. METHODS

In this study, I conducted qualitative in-depth, semi-structured interviews. A qualitative method was utilized for this study because I wanted to understand how recruiters talk about “good potential employees” and whether their beliefs are shaped by racial, gender, or other stereotypes. The relationships between recruiter, temporary employee, and client is complex. To ensure this study captured “recruiter’s experiences,” the interviews were semi-structured and face-to-face. This allowed the respondent to provide detailed descriptions of their experience while giving me the flexibility to ask follow up questions when needed. Because these relationships are complex, asking open ended interview questions unfolded these dynamic relationships and provided insightful information that would have not been obtained if I utilized a quantitative method. In-depth interviews were most appropriate for this study because I wanted to understand if and how beliefs or stereotypes can shape the construction of “good potential employees.” Previous research has shown that participants can conceal information about sensitive topics during the hiring process (Pager and Quillian 2005); in person interviews can help respondents feel more comfortable revealing information that can be socially undesirable.

Sampling and Recruitment

After I received approval from the Institutional Review Board, I conducted interviews from 2017-2018. My sample includes ten individuals who were employed or previously employed as a recruiter for a temporary staffing agency. The findings from this small sample are not generalizable to recruiters. I was more interested in gaining detailed information and insights from a targeted group of employees within the temporary staffing industry. Identifying individuals with a specific position and industry

can be challenging. For that reason, I used a snowball sampling technique to establish credibility and increase participation. Snowball sampling involves a continuous referral process based on interrelationships, and from one respondent to another one (Neuman 2009). When participant referrals became limited, I utilized LinkedIn, a professional networking website. I used advanced keyword searching to identify prospective participants on LinkedIn. Advanced keyword searching allowed me to search for prospective participants based on their current/past job title, company/organization, and geographic location. My search only included individuals who had a public LinkedIn profile with a current or past recruiter job title within temporary employment industry located in Texas. Once I identified individuals who met this benchmark, I sent them a private direct message from my personal LinkedIn account. My search only included recruiters in the temporary staffing industry because their principal job responsibility is screening and selecting potential candidates.

I interviewed six women and four men. The respondents' average age was 29, ranging from 24 to 41. Four respondents identified as white, four Hispanic, one Asian, and one African American. Most of the respondents had a bachelor's degree except for one who had an associate degree. The years of experience as a recruiter within the temporary staffing industry ranged from 7 months to 15 years. One respondent had 15 years of recruiting experience, four had 3-6 years, and five had 7 months-2 years of experience.

Interviews

All of the interview sites were at coffee shops that were most convenient for each participant. Before the interview, I obtained written consent and informed participants

that the interview would be recorded. Some participants expressed concerns about their identity and companies' proprietary information. I ensured them that I would use pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality and exclude any identifying information.

The interview guide (see Appendix 2) was semi structured with questions that were open ended. Probing questions were also used to receive clarification or to be given a more detailed response. Because there are few studies that explore the hiring process of temporary agency recruiters, I reflected on my own personal experience to formulate questions and use recruiter lingo. The interview guide followed a recruiter's principal job responsibility from start to finish. I particularly focused on the screening and selection process for potential candidates. Questions focused on respondents' current or past experiences as a temporary agency recruiter and if their beliefs about who makes a "good potential employee" were shaped by gender, race, or other characteristics.

I worked as a recruiter for a temporary staffing agency from 2014 to 2015 and made the decision to leave my previous work experience listed on my LinkedIn contact page. I wanted to make individuals feel comfortable and attract their interest to participate. Some candidates wanted to know about my experience as a recruiter. I kept my answer consistent with all participants by letting them know I was more interested in their experience and we could discuss mine after the interview, if needed. Hence, I wanted to maintain transparency while also ensuring I was not potentially influencing responses. Sociologists debate about the advantages and disadvantages of being an insider versus an outsider. When researchers share similar background characteristics such as race with their participants, they are considered "insiders" (Buford May 2014). The ability to build rapport and have an open dialogue about sensitive topics is an

advantage of being an insider researcher (Buford May 2014). Most of my participants had varying backgrounds and for many of them I was considered an outsider. Nevertheless, during my interviews I had “insider moments” when participants willingly provided detailed experiences. Insider moments are not dependent on social backgrounds. These moments are sporadic and occur when participants feel they have a mutual understanding and interest about a topic with the researcher (Buford May 2014). In a reflexive article, McClure (2007) was an outsider because her race was different from her participants but her Greek affiliation created insider moments. The participants were also affiliated with the Greek community which allowed them to share mutual experiences (McClure 2007). Similarly, my past experience as a recruiter for a temporary staffing agency allowed participants to feel comfortable enough to use recruiter lingo and share sensitive information about how and why potential candidates were selected.

Analytical strategy

I followed the grounded theory approach to analyze my data (Corbin and Strauss 2008). This approach involved two stages of coding (Esterberg 2002). In the first stage, an open coding technique entailing a thorough analysis of each transcript line-by-line, to introduce tentative codes based on patterns and commonalities (Esterberg 2002). At first, I assigned tentative labels that were apparent. I labeled “good” as a commonality when respondents thought a potential employee was a good fit and then “bad” for bad fits. In the second stage, I used the same thorough technique to group these codes into categories. One of the categories I created was committed, words like “long hours” and “good tenure” was used when describing a good fit. I repeated the coding process several times until categories became more refined. Concepts were then formulated which

developed into four major themes. I used a focused coding technique (Esterberg 2002) to reexamine these themes, develop slightly different themes, and then applied theories to interpret my findings. Acker's theory of inequality regimes (2006) was used interchangeably to reshape my themes and interpret my findings. Her ideas of the ideal worker, helped to identify participants covert and overt expressions of gender and race. According to Acker (2006) age can be another basis of inequality but was briefly mentioned in her theory of inequality regimes. To identify and code for expressions of age, I referred to previous literature on ageism in the workplace.

IV. FINDINGS

The history of the temporary employment industry is embedded with advertisements focusing on impressions of gender, race, and class (Hatton 2011). Temporary staffing agencies thrived from both their advertisement practices and their unique business model. Today, part of this is still true. One of the reasons why temporary employment agencies are successful is because of their ability to build and maintain a workforce of good temporary employees (Smith and Neuwirth 2008). Having a workforce of “good” temporary employees is a service that is in demand by American businesses. Therefore, it is important to understand how temporary employment agencies identify “good potential employees.” The recruiters I interviewed walked me through their screening and selection process. They also shared their beliefs and experiences of recruiting “good potential employees.”

I identified four main themes in the interview data. First, temporary recruiters have a similar screening process but the way they discuss the culture of “good potential candidates” differ. Second, the screening process is a form of quality control that separates the good fits from the bad fits. Third, the ideal worker can exclude good candidates if they are a particular gender, race, and/or age. Lastly, a recruiter’s construction of a “good potential employee” can be reconstructed if they cater to their clients’ ideas of the ideal candidate.

Same Process Different “Goods”: Recruiting and Screening Process

All recruiters for temporary staffing agencies employ a screening process before they begin talking to potential candidates. While most of the participants in this study were employed by different agencies, each participant described a similar screening

process. For example, recruiters initially heard about an open position from their “account manager,” “manager,” “account executive,” or “business developer.” These titles represent temporary agency staff that have the responsibility of finding and maintaining new clients. From here on, I will refer to them as “account managers.” When recruiters heard about an open position, their account managers provided them with job details. For example, Paul (assigned pseudonym, see appendix 1) described these job details as “qualifications for what they’re looking for on a resume, that that person needs to have in order for them to hire them.” In accordance with Paul’s response, Amy mentioned the importance of knowing other job details such as, “location, pay, schedule, and how long the contract was for.” The majority of recruiters provided responses similar to Amy and Paul. If recruiters needed more information about the job details, they could reach out to the clients. Once recruiters’ have a thorough understanding of the job details, recruiters begin their prospective search for candidates by utilizing a wide variety of online resources to search for resumes. Many recruiters said their temporary staffing agency had their own internal database. They also referred to job board websites such as CareerBuilder, Indeed, Monster, and LinkedIn, in order to find resumes.

To understand more about a recruiter’s screening process, I asked respondents whether they were given details about their clients’ culture. Studies have found that the hiring process involves “culture matching,” which can influence hiring decisions (Rivera 2012). Culture matching refers to a process between employers and candidates shared culture, in which employers evaluate for cultural similarities to make hiring decisions (Rivera 2012). All of the participants agreed that they were given details for culture. Some assessed culture through attire while others described culture using words/phrases

of the work environment. Some of the most utilized words/phrases participants described were “work hard, play hard,” “young,” and “outgoing.” In this case, Dan used words like “young-fun generation, like work hard play hard.” Amy described culture for a certain occupation:

Yes, we were trying to look for pharmacy technicians and they specifically wanted no one with tattoos, someone with naturally colored hair, they wanted more of an introverted personality, someone who wouldn’t try to cause problems or drama between other employees. Just one more quiet introverted it’s kind of a specific culture.

Amy’s description of culture was described as more introverted than Dan’s description of an extroverted environment. In a study by Rivera (2012), elite service firms evaluated for personalities that fit the image of their firm, some were described as “fratty,” others as “egghead.” These findings indicate that employers select candidates with similar personalities of existing employees. Likewise, Amy’s client described a specific company culture which affected her decision to select candidates with introverted personalities.

The words and phrases used to describe a client’s culture could indirectly advantage or disadvantage potential candidates. Phrases such as “young-fun generation” and “work hard, play hard” can change a recruiter’s perception of a “good potential employee.” A young-fun generation implies that the environment is a group of less experienced employees that like to have fun. This code for youth allows for individual interpretation and could potentially work as a disadvantage for workers that are older in age. Different words/phrases were used to describe culture during the screening process and may influence what it means to be a “good potential employee.” There is not a one

cultural fits all approach to recruiting, but screening for culture can create inequalities by advantaging some and disadvantaging others.

Quality Control for “Goods”

Quality control is a term that is commonly heard in manufacturing. Yet, the meaning is relative to how the quality of temporary workers is maintained in temporary agencies. Quality control is a process of procedures that ensures each product fulfills all specified standards set in place by creator and client. Smith and Neuwirth (2008) found that temporary agencies’ procedures to select and maintain temporary workers resembled a high level of quality control. A recruiter’s first interaction with a potential client is over the phone. When I asked participants to describe their interview process, many described a “phone screen” where recruiters explore whether candidates are actively or passively seeking new opportunities. After a phone screen, most participants said they would follow up with a face to face interview. If the recruiter thinks the potential candidate is a good fit after the face to face interview, then the next step is for the candidate to submit their resume to their account manager. The account manager sends the resume of the potential candidate to their client if the account manager agrees with the recruiter’s assessment of the candidate. Finally, the account managers will set up a face-to-face interview for their client to meet with the potential candidate.

An ideal temporary employee will have certain characteristics including a good attitude and competence (Smith and Neuwirth 2009). A good attitude will adhere to the terms of temporary work and competence will vary by position but requires the minimum expectations to be met (Smith and Neuwirth 2009). Similarly, I found that many of the participants in this study described a potential candidate’s competency and commitment

when recounting a “good fit.” For example, several respondents highlighted “relevant experience, good skills, and good communication,” as important qualities for good temporary employees. While Smith and Neuwirth (2009) characterized a good temporary employee as someone who has a willing attitude to accept the precarious terms of temporary employment, the respondents I interviewed emphasized importance of commitment. For example, Beth and Kat used the phrase “good tenure” and Paul referred to “job tenure, loyal employee, hadn’t jumped around a lot.” Employment histories serve as a signal of commitment and play an important role that affects an employer’s evaluation (Leung 2014; Pedulla 2016). “Good” tenure is an important quality for potential temporary employees because their employment history serves as a signal for how committed they will be to their temporary employment agency and/or commitment to the client. Respondents also mentioned particular personality traits that signal being a good temporary employee (see Smith and Neuwirth 2009). When Paul was asked about the qualities of good temporary workers, he responded:

I think personality is one thing that you always look for as a recruiter in a candidate is someone who is who is personable you know. You want to send a candidate that you’re certain about, that is going to open up. Who’s bubbly, who can talk, and who can kinda explain their work history and that candidate definitely had that too as well. She was very friendly. You don’t want to send someone who is going to be a grouch because they won’t hire that person, you know. That will come out in the interview, too.

Similar to Paul’s response, recruiters used the words “sweet,” “outgoing,” and “cute” when describing the qualities of good temporary workers. Just as certain words and

phrases can be used as codes for age, “sweet” and “cute” can be used as codes for gender and to indicate preferences for hiring women for some temporary positions.

According to Smith and Neuwirth (2009), temporary agency staff engage in quality control when selecting potential temporary employees as they attempt to detect good and behaviors. I asked participants to describe an experience when a potential candidate was not a good fit for a position. Their answers were conversely related to the good fits they had just described. For example, respondents referred to “job hopper, had millions of jobs, gaps in resume, and stumbling her words” as candidates who were bad fits. They also described other negative personal qualities such as pretentious, not polished, laid back, and stuck in their habits. Amy described a candidate who was a bad fit for a pharmacy technician position:

So that same company that looks for very like soft spoken, introverted, but nice of course personality. I had a guy who came in who was very kinda wanna say pretentious, but he was very just like you know kinda full of himself a little bit and he talked really bad about his previous employer.

A good fit was described as someone who is “soft spoken” and had a “nice personality.” When Amy described a bad fit she described a potential candidate who had a pretentious attitude. In a study by Rogers (1995), clerical temporary employees lacked control of their job duties, working conditions, and often constrained themselves from speaking up because they wanted to please their temporary agency. Amy’s comment shows that ideal temporary employees are expected to be subordinate. Therefore, pretentious seems to be a code for a potential temporary employee who will not be subordinate or act subservient.

When talking about “good potential employees,” recruiters described professional

and personal qualities. Competency and commitment reflected professional qualities while personal qualities were described through the clients' culture. These qualities can be used as benchmarks for recruiters by separating the good fits from the bad fits. Organizational practices during recruitment and hiring can challenge or maintain inequalities.

Production of the Ideal Worker: Selecting Gender, Race, and Age

Selecting for Gender

According to Joan Acker's theory of gendered organizations (1990) and inequality regimes (2006), employers seek ideal workers who will be productive, committed, and dedicated. Her theory maintains that employer conceptions about "committed" workers often disadvantage women and racial and ethnic minorities because of sexist and racist stereotypes. For example, men are often automatically seen as more committed to work because of cultural assumptions that they are unencumbered by caregiving or familial responsibilities. In temporary work, however, ideal workers are not necessarily conceptualized as men. During recruitment and hiring, dominant cultural beliefs about men and women can influence perceptions about good fits for particular jobs. Some temporary jobs are seen as women's work and others are seen as men's work. Temporary employment has been historically gendered and re-gendered (Hatton 2014). Further, occupational gender typing and the idea of the "ideal worker" operate together in the production and reproduction of gender inequality (Hatton 2014).

To explore recruiters' beliefs about gender, I asked them whether they knew of any positions that were better suited for a man. Aron describes a general laborer position:

Yeah. Absolutely the oil and gas industry like I said that was a predominantly

male industry, 100%. Predominantly male but like I said it's not that I didn't hire women, it's just that they were few and far between because it's a very dirty job. Like I said, you're out there 16 hours a day from 5am to you know midnight. Basically a lot of times just the background for those people are male dominant like mechanics or construction or just outside hard labor. Obviously you want to make sure they can do the job and a lot of those times males are I guess the ones in those positions so it was easy to go through "Hey you're going to be doing this, this, and this and they respond "Yeah I've done that before". Whereas more time that not, whenever I interviewed a woman for that position, "I've never done that before but I know I can do it". I can't really rely on "Yeah I can". I had to have some kind of concrete evidence whenever I'm submitting them to my manager or the company I'm recruiting for...

Aron explained that general laborer positions are better suited for men. In addition, Aron elaborates about the working conditions, such as, elongated working hours. From Acker's (1990) perspective, women would be viewed as less committed to working long hours because of their additional obligations outside of work. A man may be the ideal worker for a general laborer position because this type of work is seen as more appropriate for men. Towards the end of Aron's statement, he mentions that women typically don't have previous experience as a general laborer. However, Acker (2006) would argue that even when women do have competency and experience, judgements about women having a lower level of competency than men would exclude women applicants. Therefore, women would not be the ideal potential temporary employee for general laborer positions regardless of their experience.

For Kat, the qualifications of a candidate were most important, but a client of hers believed men were better suited for a particular occupation. Kat describes her conflicting views with her client:

We're looking for machinist, whatever. Oh that's a job for man and I'll say no its for anybody. It's for anyone that has experience. So when a woman that has that experience and a client that is willing to take a woman then I like that, I'd prefer that.

The client's gendered beliefs about machinists could have excluded women who were as equally qualified as men. Kat's response to her client was that a machinist was anyone with experience. Despite her opposing views, women not only had to be qualified but the clients have to be willing to hire women; indicating that the hiring decision is somewhat out of Kat's control. Other participants in this study described men as better suited for particular occupations because of physical requirements. For instance, Dan described a general laborer:

It doesn't matter whichever one gets the job done...with the general labor obviously you can-not discriminate, but typically they (the client) would tell us that they would be moving large equipment that weighed up to 50 pounds. So during the interview process, "Hey are you comfortable lifting 50 pounds all day".

General laborer positions are often entry level or require little experience, therefore recruiters often rely on the candidate's willingness to perform certain job duties. Instead of Dan deciding if a man or woman is a "good potential employee," he lets the candidate decide. This way, the participant can choose whether or not they will be the best

candidate for this occupation and job.

The data suggest that women are perceived to be the ideal worker for other occupations. Clerical occupations for temporary work are historically gendered (Hatton 2014). Here, Ben explains that administrative occupations are dominated by women:

Yeah. Well like administrative positions, those are mostly women. But I come across guys and I don't cap them out. I still talk to them. But most of the time guys don't want to do paperwork.

Ben explained that he did not exclude men from administrative positions but women mostly occupied this position. He assumes that the task of paperwork was not desirable to the men he had interviewed. Historically, office work in the 1960s was feminized in temporary work advertisements (Hatton 2011; Hatton 2014). Through previous research, we know that temporary office work continued to be feminized. According to Rogers (1995), women occupied most clerical temporary jobs in the 1990s. The reason this job continues to be dominated by mostly women may be because certain images of female and male bodies can influence perception and hiring (Acker 2006). For the recruiters in this study, images of the ideal worker shaped their perception and decision on who to hire.

I asked recruiters whether they had a hiring preference for men or women. In some cases, the participants themselves favored a particular gender when recruiting. Aron explains:

I would prefer to hire women more than men just for the shire fact that they are

able to be professional when it's called. Whereas a man may take that with a grain of salt and may not be as professional at times, where they could say some really out of line things....Whereas women have a filter, they have that filter where they can stop themselves before, you know, they say something.

Aron's description of women having a filter can be a code for gender stereotypes. At first glance, his preference for women is because of their professionalism. Then, his belief that women are less outspoken can have both negative and positive outcomes during the hiring process. In this case, being a woman could be advantageous in being selected for a potential job opportunity. The majority of participants did not have a gender preference. Instead, many participants described a situation in which their clients (the companies their recruiting for) preferred a certain gender. Niki describes an experience with one of her clients:

We do have clients that they prefer that. Just because I've had it where it's a very small office and it's all men working and they may use profanity and what not. So, they may feel that either that person has to be okay with it or someone, maybe someone of a certain gender may be okay with it. Or sometimes we have clients of a small office of just women and just two people in the office maybe and they prefer another woman. So in that case to the client's preference, I'll still send whoever we have and can get, but you know I try to lean and make sure everyone is comfortable in the situation, but as far as hiring I don't have a specific preference.

As Acker (1990) explained, casual talk centering male interest such as sports exclude

women from bonding with their colleagues. Niki's client explained that use of profanity in the workplace was a reason why women might be excluded from the potential position. Profanity was also described by Niki as a symbol of male bonding. The idea that women do not like using or hearing curse words is a stereotype and can lead to negative outcomes during the hiring process. Niki's last statement reveals that she favored or chose what was more comfortable for the client or potential candidate. A few participants described similar experiences about their client. Paul's client asked for "women versus men...but never...a man not a woman." Some of Beth's clients "aren't comfortable with having a gentleman." Neither Beth nor Paul provided additional reasons why their clients preferred a particular gender. Instead, the participants in this study simply described that their clients had gender preferences.

Selecting for Race

In the post-war period temporary workers were seen as secondary workers who were white, middle class women (Hatton 2014). Jobs and occupations can be segregated by gender and race. Racial biases and stereotypes are still present in organizations and have been well documented in previous research. Half of the participants in this study recollected comments by their clients to exclude potential candidates who were black. Beth's client stated "I don't want someone who's black in this role." Likewise, Kat's client said "he didn't want black employees," and Joe's stated "don't send black guys." When asked about racial preferences of clients Kat said:

Actually, at a different agency I worked at several years ago, the general manager specifically asked for Hispanic people. He didn't want any Black employees at all because I guess there was an in issue where, well what he explained was that what

they did was sell trucks like 18 wheelers. They had all kinds of parts and delivery drivers or whatever. So what he said was that there was kind of a ring going on. Well these people got together to steal this merchandise and they lost like millions of dollars in merchandise and so he said they were all black and so after that he was like I don't want any black people. I want Hispanic, mostly Hispanic or you know White people would be okay too, but he preferred Hispanic. You know I actually even had a client say give me some of them Spanish boys. Like I don't know I don't even know how to react to that but yeah, unfortunately, yeah it happened.

The theft that Kat's client described to her was one of the reasons why the client did not want to hire black employees. Racist stereotypes that black people steal along with a client's bias to only hire Hispanics instead of Black employees are an unjust practice during the hiring process. Similarly, Joe responded differently and in defiance of his clients' racial preferences:

We did come across a couple of instances where there was some racial preferences for the type of candidates that they wanted to see. I can always remember one client, an individual who was like don't send black guys here. In that case I did send a black guy there but he was half black and half Latino and you know he got the job and he did well and he didn't get fired or anything. So I think he kinda broke the mold there but the owner came by one second and I don't know, he said a racial slur or something to him but the candidate told me about it and he kinda laughed about it you know.

Joe's client did not want him to select potential candidates who were black. Nevertheless, the client agreed to hire Joe's candidate. While this study is primarily focused on the hiring process, it is important to briefly expand on the racial slur Joe's temporary employee experienced on the job. In the study by Smith and Neuwirth (2009), unjust verbal treatment at client sites can sometimes be left unresolved despite confrontation between agency and client. Some recruiters like Joe do not adhere to their clients' racial preferences. Further, recruiters will talk to their clients and educate their clients on why they cannot recruit or exclude potential candidates because of their race. Beth described a time when she educated one of her clients:

Yes. I have had clients tell me I do not want someone who's black in this role and we always tell them we are EEOC; we have to send somebody based on their skills.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission requires temporary staffing agencies to follow the same laws as their clients (traditional workplaces). The experience Beth and Joe described show that recruiters are capable of making their own decisions when selecting potential candidates, while other recruiters may change their selection or alter the way they construct a "good potential employee." For example, Aron described the ideal person for the oil and gas industry:

Whenever we were recruiting for the oil and gas industry in south Texas, the ideal person was a tall white male maybe with a little bit of a country background that's a hard worker. That was the ideal person. Not to say they didn't hire anyone else. They hired a lot of Hispanics who worked

hard but ideally that's what they described to us... Now I'm not trying to say we didn't hire any kind of African Americans or Hispanics or anyone else, but ideally you saw the managers and their positions and the way they rose up to the top were predominately young, white male, probably in their late 20s. Mid 20s manager are probably around the same age maybe in their 30s.

The way Aron constructed a “good potential employee” for the oil and gas industry was through his clients’ description and his own perception. During recruitment, images of racialized bodies can also influence perception (Acker 2006). In this case, Aron’s observation of hierarchy was associated with gender, race and age. Those characteristics were how Aron connected and constructed what is meant to be a “good potential employee” in the oil and gas industry. Aron never explicitly said he selected potential candidates because of their race but he implied that there were advantages of being a young, white male.

The interviews suggest that racial exclusions and preferences can occur during the hiring process. Many participants in this study described experiences in which their clients talked about and constructed stereotypes about black people. Some clients even stated “don’t send black guys,” but some recruiters either chose to dismiss their comments or educate their clients about equal employment.

Selecting for Age

Equal employment laws protect workers over the age of 40 from age discrimination. Several studies have documented age discrimination in workplaces (Roscigno et al. 2007; Macdonald and Levy 2016; Wilson and Roscigno 2018; Chou and

Choi 2011; Gee, Pavalko, and Long 2007). In traditional work arrangements, studies have found that older workers will have a higher perception of age discrimination in their early fifties then will gradually decrease after 55 (Gee, Pavalko, and Long 2007; Chou and Choi 2011). Displaced workers that are 55 and older experience the most obstacles when trying to re-enter the workforce (Roscigno 2010). Some of these workers find part-time or temporary employment, while others eventually disconnect themselves from work altogether (Roscigno 2010).

I asked participants whether age was an important characteristic during the selection process. Recruiters described why some positions might have been for a younger candidate. Beth described a position that required someone to be tech savvy:

Characteristics, just you know how sharp someone is, if they are intelligent.

Usually if someone is younger than they are more incline to adapt to the technology. So if this is tech savvy, then clients prefer to have someone younger.

However, we do, do skills testings...I will say a lot of the times when a client sees someone who's kind of a little bit on the older side they are very surprised.

Older people in workplaces are often stereotyped as being technologically challenged. In many cases, older workers have challenged these stereotypes. Kat describes how age "plays a factor" on who is selected for a potential position:

That does unfortunately that does play a factor into it. Depending on the job, we do have some jobs that are more geared towards a younger person; a more able-minded person. Which really sucks sometimes because I understand that older

people need to get their bills paid and everything. Actually, I have a gentleman now who is a little older and again he has a great personality, good work history, so I'm hoping to be able to place him somewhere, obviously, you know despite his age.

Kat's comment describing a younger person as able minded has an undertone that implies an older person might be less able minded. Also, her last statement mentions that this older candidate had good professional and personal qualities "despite his age." Kat still thinks of her candidate as a "good potential employee" but she is selective about the type of job. Kat and Beth have similar beliefs about older workers being mentally incapable. Roscigno et al. (2007) found that employers had ageist beliefs about older workers being unable to perform as well as younger workers. It is difficult to ascertain whether Kat and Beth's beliefs spurred discriminatory actions. However, their beliefs can lead to excluding older workers from hiring opportunities and affect an older worker's aspiration to continue working. In the study by Macdonald and Levy (2016), workers with more social support from their supervisors and co-workers were more satisfied, committed, and engaged with their job. Social support could possibly prevent the negative effects of ageism in the workplace (Macdonald and Levy 2016). Similarly, temporary agency recruiters could provide more social support to older prospective temporary employees.

The interviews demonstrate how recruiters' beliefs about who makes a "good potential employee" are shaped by racial, gender, or other stereotypes. Participants described their beliefs about why some men or women were better suited for certain occupations or industries. Several respondents described their clients' preference for a particular gender or had a gender preference themselves. Similarly, racial exclusions and

preferences made by a client can reform a recruiter's perception. Lastly, a couple of recruiters subtly excluded older candidates but it did not change their belief about who makes a "good potential employee."

Re-Production of the Ideal Temporary Worker: Catering to the Client

Temporary agency recruiters provide services to potential employees and American businesses. Past research has viewed the agencies position as "serving two masters" their products and clients (Smith and Neuwirth 2009: 58). "Serving two masters" implies that the agency is lacking power. This implication could be challenged by using Blau's (1964) core assumption that an imbalance of exchange may lead to power differences. From Blau's perspective, the demand for services indicates the dependency of a client. Therefore, recruiters have more power and will have control in the construction of "good potential employees." Some of the experiences of recruiters in this study complicated this power dynamic because their construction included the clients' descriptions of the ideal candidate even if it conflicted with their own beliefs.

Towards the end of the interview, I asked participants whether they had ever discriminated against a candidate during the screening or selection process. More than half of the candidates said they did not, while the remaining gave reasons why they did. Niki explained her reason for selecting candidates based on their age:

I would probably have to say yes. If the client was like I need someone that is going to be a little bit more mature or younger in that case and just saying okay well if that's what you're looking for then this candidate would be the right choice and if I have to choose them, I would just send them but nothing intentional.

The words mature and younger used by clients were codes that influenced Niki's decision to select candidates of a certain age. Adhering to the client's needs was a common reason why participants said they engaged in discrimination. According to Beth:

Yes. Haha, there was a client, they had been known. They never told us specifically that they didn't want someone who is African American but they every time we sent somebody, they do not want them there at all. They want them to be removed the next day for various reasons. They always give us feedback so we, in order to kinda keep the business and I think it's also because we've been with them or we have been their primary contact for so long that we sometimes will cater to that unfortunately, yeah haha.

Beth indirectly describes that her reason for selecting candidates based on their race was because her client did not want to hire African Americans. Even if she hired a candidate who was African American, then her client removed them from the job site. Similar to Niki, catering to the client was one of the reasons she explained for engaging in discrimination. Kat also stated that she discriminated against prospective candidates. She adds how she had conflicting interests:

Unfortunately yes. Only because again, if it was a client's specific you know what they were asking for. You know it feels bad you know because anybody should have that opportunity. But I also have to do my job, so it's kind of conflicting I guess.

A client's idea of the ideal candidate is important to recruiters because it is their job

responsibility to meet the standards set in place by the client. Stereotypes, biases, and blatant unjust statements from the client could reconstruct a recruiter's view of a "good potential candidate" even if it conflicted with their own beliefs. Some respondents said that they engaged in discrimination because they were catering to their clients' ideas of an ideal candidate. Using Blau's four conditions of social independence, clients may have just as much power in the construction of "good potential employees." The client and agency are not subject to each other's power unless one becomes more dependent on needed benefits. Beth catered to her client by excluding potential candidates that were African American because she wanted to "keep the business." Similar to Smith and Neuwirth (2009) findings, Select Labor (a staffing agency) found that a client of theirs was discriminating against African American temporary employees and Select Labor continued to place temporary workers because they were afraid of losing revenue. Beth did not mention that her agency feared the loss of revenue from their client, but she did imply that she did not want to lose the client. The client seems to be rewarding recruiters through economic exchange by selecting the ideal candidate in exchange for continued profit. In a perfect temporary employment arrangement, the client and the recruiter both share power. When the client is in need of a service, the temporary agency has the power to provide them that service. The agency needs clients just as much as the client needs a recruiting service. They then enter into a business partnership with a common goal to hire the ideal candidate for a particular position. Their common goal may become complicated when they have different views and beliefs. They then both have the option to break their partnership and find alternatives. However, when a temporary agency recruiter caters to the clients' demands despite their beliefs, it shows that there is an

imbalance of power. With this imbalance recruiters could be vulnerable to making unjust selections. According to Joe:

That would depend on the client's preference so that's what we're fighting against as a staffing agency; to make sure we are compliant with our clients wishes and make sure were not breaking the law by discriminating on their behalf right.

Recruiters like Joe want to adhere to their client preferences but not at the expense of breaking the law. When clients have stereotypes, biases, or make blatant unjust statements recruiters stop talking about "good potential employees" and start talking about a client's ideal worker. Some recruiters decided to cater to their clients' ideal worker even if it seemed unjust. A reason this might happen is because of the economic exchange of candidates for profit. The majority of participants in this study did not cater to their client's ideas of the ideal candidate. Recruiters can have just as much power as their clients. Some recruiters in this study dismissed unjust comments and provided education about equal employment.

According to Acker (2006), organizations have largely contributed to social and economic inequality in the U.S. Stereotypes and biases are often deeply embedded in recruitment and hiring. For instance, the recruitment of ideal workers maintains ideas about femininity and masculinity, as well as racial inferiority. Women and people of color are blocked from certain job opportunities but accepted into more appropriate roles that are marked with lower statuses. The participants in this study described how their clients' stereotypes and biases changed the way they selected temporary potential candidates. Some of the participants felt that they had discriminated because of their

clients' beliefs and preferences.

The hiring and recruitment practices set forth by temporary agencies is at the forefront of building a vulnerable workforce. Temporary agencies and their clients recognize the vulnerability of temporary workers with their willingness to accept unsteady, low status work with less pay and fewer benefits. Therefore, temporary employees are especially vulnerable to discrimination because they have little recourse and power. Discriminating against prospective temporary employees based on their gender, age, and race will create inequalities within the secondary segment of the workforce and maintain inequalities in the primary segment.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Inequalities can be best understood by analyzing an organization's practices and processes. Past research has shown that temporary agency practices were once sexist and racist (Hatton 2011), but recent research has shown that agency practices are robust and legitimate (Smith and Neuwirth 2008). Using a qualitative study to explore recruiters' hiring practices, I have argued that temporary agency recruiters have stereotyped beliefs and biases that shape their conception of "good potential temporary employees." In this study, recruiting practices such as screening for culture fit revealed subtle sexist and ageist codes that indicated preferences for hiring women and younger workers. Recruiters were also heavily influenced by their clients hiring preferences. Some recruiters described moments when clients shared their sexist, ageist and racist beliefs thus, reconstructing their hiring criteria to cater to their clients' ideal temporary employee.

Acker's theory of inequality regimes (2006) makes a connection between the ideal worker and ideal temporary employee. Similarly, organizations want both types of workers to have a sole committed to their job. Contrary to the ideal worker being a man, in temporary employment women are seen as ideal for particular occupations (Acker 2006). The recruiters in this study described administrative positions as more appropriate for women and machinist and general laborer positions as less appropriate. Furthermore, recruiters described ideal temporary employees from their clients' perspectives rather than their own. Organizational hiring practices such as using temporary employment services to hire ideal workers appears to be a mechanism that re-create inequalities in workplaces.

The participants in this study described how their clients' beliefs and preferences greatly influenced their hiring decisions. To examine this influence, I utilized Blau's

analysis of resources and power. More specifically, I applied Blau's four conditions of social independence and concluded that clients and temporary agency recruiters have different power relationships. The interview data suggested that in certain situations, temporary agency recruiters are powerless during the hiring process. Some of the recruiters in this study described catering to their clients' ageist and racialized beliefs because they felt like they are at risk of losing their job or their agencies' long-term partnership.

This study does not fully support Smith and Neuwirth's (2008) findings that temporary agency staff are advocates for their temporary employees and their hiring practices are legitimate. Recruiters' hiring practices are often guided by their clients' goals to hire ideal temporary employees. On the surface it appears that "good potential temporary employees" are described as knowledgeable and experienced by temporary recruiters in this study. Then, when discussing recruiters' on the job experiences, their perceptions of "good" changed. Few recruiters in this study indicated that they had their own gender and ageist beliefs but most recruiters had described how their clients had unjust beliefs. Clients' beliefs can influence recruiters' hiring practices and decisions. Therefore, temporary agency recruiters are susceptible to illegitimate practices.

This study has several limitations. Although these findings are not meant to be generalizable to the population, the small number of participants in this study is a limitation. A larger sample size could have provided more meaningful patterns of recruiters' beliefs rather than their clients' beliefs. The goal of this study was to understand hiring practices and processes from the perspective of a recruiter. No studies have explored recruiters' perspectives of their clients' beliefs about ideal temporary

employees. Because clients play a pivotal role in hiring decisions, future studies should explore why clients use temporary agency services and when and how illegitimate beliefs and preferences are communicated.

According to Acker (2006), organizations have the ability to control others to maintain their gendered and racialized beliefs because they have the most power and economic advantage. Sociologists have recognized that one way organizations maintain their beliefs is through recruitment and hiring practices. Temporary agency recruiters are uniquely positioned to work alongside organizations to ensure that their recruitment goals are achieved. Recruiters can minimize discriminatory practices towards temporary workers and possibly all workers in organizations that use temporary agency services. This can be achieved if recruiters' hiring practices consist of reflecting on their own biases and their clients. To that end, recruiters also must be willing to educate their clients on equal employment laws. Doing so may limit unjust practices and possibly alter criticisms of temporary employment services.

APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX I: DEMOGRAPHICS

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>	<u>Education</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Experience</u>
Amy	Female	24	Hispanic	Bachelor's Degree	Recruiter	1 year and 2 months
Beth	Female	27	Asian	Bachelor's Degree	Sr. Staffing Manager	4 years
Kat	Female	34	Hispanic	College/Associates	Technical Recruiter	6 years
Niki	Female	28	African American	Bachelor's Degree	Sr. Staffing Manager	5 years
Aron	Male	27	Hispanic	Bachelor's Degree	Technical Energy Recruiter	2 years
Ben	Male	41	White	Bachelor of Science Degree	Senior Recruiter	15 years
Dan	Male	24	White	Bachelor of Art in Finance	Clinical Research Recruiter	11 months
Frank	Male	25	Hispanic	Bachelor's Degree	Talent and Solutions Consultant	1 year
Joe	Male	29	White	Bachelor of Science Degree	Recruiter	4 years
Paul	Male	30	Mexican American or White	Bachelor's Degree	Recruiter	7-9 months

APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE

I. Demographic Questions and Background

1. Please identify your gender _____
2. Age _____
3. Please identify your race _____
4. What is your highest level of education _____
5. What is/was the title of the position when you working as a recruiter for a temporary staffing agency? _____
6. How long have/did you work as a recruiter for a temporary staffing agency? _____

II. Screening Process

1. How do you initially find out about an open position? Are there any specific details you are given about the position?
2. Are you given details about your client's (company your recruiting for) company culture? If so, describe to me a type of company culture a client or your manager has described to you.
3. Are there any other details you need to know about a position or the company, before you begin your search for prospective candidates?
4. What resources or tools do you use to identify prospective candidates?
5. What are some red flags you have seen on a prospective candidate's résumé, cover letter, or social media account?
6. How do you usually interview prospective candidates (i.e., email, phone, in-person)? Walk me through your interview process.

III. Selection Process

1. Tell me about a time when you interviewed a prospective candidate that was a good fit for a position? What were some of their best personal and professional qualities?
2. Tell me about a time when you interviewed a prospective candidate that NOT a good fit for a position? Were there any personal or professional qualities that indicated they were a bad fit?
3. How do you determine if a prospective candidate is good culture fit for the company you're recruiting for?
4. Would you say you prefer to hire men or women?
5. Has there ever been a job that you recruited for and you knew a man would be more suited for that particular position?
6. Are there any other characteristics you look for in a candidate? What about age?

7. Have your clients (companies you recruit for) or manager asked you or suggested that you recruit for a candidate based off of their race/ethnicity?

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