BACKGROUND

- The pipeline of cancer researchers is dependent on numerous factors.
- Audit studies suggest that racial and/or gender discrimination may disadvantage Black (vs. White) people with respect to educational and professional advancement (Gaddis, 2014; Milkman, 2012; Nunley et al., 2014; Reuben, 2015).

OBJECTIVE

- To determine if prospective Black male doctoral students experience a disparity in responses when seeking access to NCI-funded PIs compared to their Caucasian/White counterparts.
- Our primary aim was to explore response and acceptance rates for Black (vs. White) men seeking cancer-research mentorship. Secondly, we explored differences in response and acceptance rates for both cohorts by evaluators’ race and gender.

METHODS

- Audit study; field experiment
- Subjects were 1,028 randomly selected PIs affiliated with one of the 65 NCI-designated cancer centers. PIs had currently funded, cancer-related grants, and were affiliated with a university.
- PIs were randomly assigned to receive an identical fictitious email from either a “Brad Anderson” (White; n = 513) or a “Lamar Washington” (Black; n = 515) (Milkman 2015).
- Emails were sent at 9:00 (local time) on a Monday morning on September 28, 2015, requesting a 10-minute meeting the following Monday (see Sample Email).
- Email responses were coded for two outcomes: (1) any response within one week (yes/no); and (2) type of response if received (agree to meet/not agree to meet).
- Scripted email responses were sent to PIs who offered to meet Brad or Lamar (not shown).
- Debriefing letters were sent to all PIs approximately 1 month later.
- Logistic regression was used to examine unadjusted and adjusted effects of condition (White/Black) on the primary outcomes.
- In adjusted models, PI gender and time zone were included as covariates (Pis identified as African American=1.2%).

RESULTS

- Approximately 50.0% and 48.3% of the sample responded to ‘Brad’ and ‘Lamar,’ respectively.
- Condition & evaluators’ gender were not a significant predictor of ‘any response’ in unadjusted or adjusted models.
- For those who responded, 43.7% and 40.9% ‘agreed’ to meet with Brad and Lamar, respectively.
- Condition was not a significant predictor of ‘response type’ in either unadjusted (p=.53, odds ratio 95% CI=0.78-1.61) or adjusted (p=.51, odds ratio 95% CI=0.78-1.64) models. In the adjusted model, only PI gender was a significant predictor of ‘response type’ (p=.03, odds ratio 95% CI=1.04-2.29), with males (45.8%) being more likely to ‘agree to meet’ than female PIs (35.6%).

LIMITATIONS

- Recipient PI may not even access their own official NIH Reporter settings requires further exploration in future work.

CONCLUSION

- We did not find strong evidence of bias by NCI-funded PIs against Black (vs. White) prospective Ph.D. students.

DISCUSSION

- In a review of 36 studies of healthcare providers, 27 found evidence of racist beliefs, emotions, and/or practices (Paradies et al., 2013).
- Nunley et al. (2014) recently argued that the effects of racial discrimination against African-American job seekers may concentrate at a ‘race-skill level.’
- Although our findings suggest bias does not exist in introductory email communications, the complexity of racial bias in educational settings requires further exploration in future work.

REFERENCES