"We cannot discriminate against someone without an eye or a leg … But I do look at obesity": Statistical discrimination and employers' recruitment strategies at housecleaning service companies in Johannesburg

by David du Toit[*]

Abstract

The landscape of paid domestic work has changed considerably in recent years with the growth in the number of housecleaning service companies in South Africa and elsewhere. Housecleaning service companies transform domestic work into a service economy where trained domestic workers render a professional cleaning service to clients. In South Africa, little is known about the factors that employers at housecleaning service companies take into consideration during the selection and recruitment process. A key feature of paid domestic work is the gender, class and race constructions of domestic workers, the vast majority of whom are women, usually women of colour, from low socio-economic backgrounds. Whether we are seeing a change in the demographic profile of domestic workers with the growth of housecleaning service companies remains unclear. This paper therefore focuses on the recruitment strategies of employers at selected housecleaning service companies in Johannesburg in an attempt to shed light on the challenges that job-seeking domestic workers may face. Open-ended interviews with managers revealed that gender, race, age, long-term unemployment, and technical and personal skills of job-seeking domestic workers have a strong impact on the recruitment process, while immigration status plays a somewhat reduced role. This paper concludes that housecleaning service companies have not changed the demographic profile of domestic workers in South Africa yet, and that paid domestic work is still predominantly a black woman's job.

Key words: *housecleaning service companies, domestic work, recruitment strategies, statistical discrimination*

1　Introduction

The employment of domestic workers is an integral feature of South African life. The Quarterly Labour Force Survey (2015:vii) estimates that there are just over one million domestic workers in South Africa, and that the domestic work sector is the largest employer of mainly African women (Fish 2006:108). Domestic work includes general household chores, preparing meals for employers, caring for the elderly, and for

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employers' children and pets (Anderson 2000:15). Generally, traditional paid domestic work is perceived as a low-skilled job, often undertaken by the minority group with little education (Cock 1980; Ally 2010).

Two patterns emerge from the literature on paid domestic work in South Africa. One set of studies highlights the historical background of domestic work in South Africa in terms of gender, class and race (Ally 2010; Boddington 1983; Cock 1980; Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie & Unterhalter 1983; Van Onselen 1982). The relationship between gender, class and race in domestic work is complex, as domestic work has historically been performed by black female servants for white middle-class and elite employers (Gaitskell et al 1983:88; Hickson & Strous 1993:109). The seminal work in South Africa on this is Jacklyn Cock's *Maids and Madams* (1980), which provides a useful assessment of domestic work under apartheid.

In South Africa labour rights were extended to the domestic sector in 1996. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act was the first Act to formalise domestic work as a "protected sector within the legislative framework" (Fish 2006:116). This resulted in a second set of studies that focused on the causes and consequences of the transition of domestic work from precarious work to work that is formalised and presumably protected by labour laws in post-apartheid South Africa (Du Preez, Beswick, Whittaker & Dickinson 2010; Fish 2006; King 2007; Grossman 2011; Ally 2010). Key works include Alison King's *Domestic service in post-apartheid South Africa: Difference and disdain* (2007) and Shireen Ally's *From servants to workers: South African domestic workers and the democratic state* (2010). However, none of these studies has looked at domestic work in the context of housecleaning service companies. The only detailed study to date on housecleaning service companies in South Africa was Du Toit's (2012) Master's research study, which was published in a subsequent article (Du Toit 2013). This study focused on the working conditions and changes in employment relations of housecleaning service companies in the Stellenbosch area (Du Toit 2013). However, a question that has largely gone unanswered, and one that this paper wants to shed some light on, is whether housecleaning service companies are changing the demographic profile of the domestic work sector in South Africa.

Although research has been done in countries such as the United States (Salzinger 1991; Mendez 1998; Ehrenreich 2000), Australia (Meagher 1997), France (Devetter & Rousseau 2009) and Portugal (Abrantes 2014) on the nature of housecleaning services, little has been done in the South African context (Du Toit 2012, 2013). To date there is no South African study that has focused on how these housecleaning companies operate in terms of selection and recruitment strategies used in employing domestic workers. This paper therefore focuses on the selection and recruitment strategies that employers of housecleaning service companies use for the following reasons: First, since black African women are overrepresented among unemployed groups in South Africa, they often end up as domestic workers for middle-class households. With the increase in outsourced housecleaning service companies across the country that emphasise a professionally trained workforce, a better understanding of the challenges that applicants face may shed some light on how certain groups of people are discriminated against more than others. Secondly, since domestic workers often lack formal skills and education, employers at housecleaning service companies may focus more on the individual qualities of jobseekers such as personality, motivation, social competencies, interpersonal skills, age and appearances during the screening, selection and recruitment processes. Research shows that human and social capital, hard and soft skills, and demographic characteristics of jobseekers are important even in elite

professional organisations and that jobseekers are often faced with "a combination of discrimination and error" (Rivera 2012:999). What factors do employers at housecleaning service companies take into consideration during the recruitment and selection process? There has been no scholarly study on this matter in South Africa and this study hopes to go some way towards filling this void.

2   Background of housecleaning service companies

Globally and in South Africa, the landscape of paid domestic work has changed considerably with the growth in the number of outsourced housecleaning service companies, which has been the focus of a few studies. Some international studies on housecleaning service companies reveal that they have revolutionised domestic work, because they have shifted the market for domestic work to the service sector (Devetter & Rousseau 2009:312). Mendez (1998:118) calls this the "commodification of domestic service", while Ehrenreich (2000:64) refers to it as "a fully capitalist-style workplace". Housecleaning service companies have transformed domestic work in that domestic workers are trained to clean rooms using a standard "top to bottom, [and] left to right" technique and they are often accompanied by qualified and skilled managers and supervisors (Ehrenreich 2000:66).

Housecleaning service companies in South Africa offer cleaning services on a weekly, bi-weekly, monthly or on an ad hoc basis, with domestic workers offering a professional cleaning service aimed at the niche market of clients who want the convenience of having their houses professionally cleaned. Housecleaning service companies mostly render general housecleaning services inside clients' homes; these services usually exclude window and pool cleaning. Some housecleaning service companies provide cleaning equipment, uniforms and lunch for domestic workers, whereas others do not.

Three main types of housecleaning service companies operate in South Africa. The first type renders cleaning services using teams of domestic workers. Supervisors usually divide the work among a team of up to five domestic workers, where one worker will clean the bathroom and bedroom, another one the kitchen and lounge and another one does the ironing and so forth. Teams of domestic workers clean up to three houses per day in sessions that last up to three hours (Du Toit 2012, 2013). The second type of housecleaning service company provides clients with one domestic worker for the day on either a regular or an ad hoc basis. In both cases the housecleaning service company is legally the employer of the domestic workers and deals with all administrative issues concerning these workers such as wages, employment contracts, and UIF and CCMA issues. The clients pay the housecleaning company for services rendered and the employer pays the domestic workers. The third type of housecleaning service company operates on the principle of a placement agency, where housecleaning service companies place a trained domestic worker with a client for a once-off fee. For example, clients may call the housecleaning service company with specific requirements regarding the type of domestic worker they would like in terms of demographics and/or specific skills. In this case, clients pay the housecleaning service company a placement fee and thereafter the client is the legal employer of the domestic worker (Du Toit 2012).

Most housecleaning service companies require relatively little start-up equipment or capital, making it relatively easy for new entrepreneurs to enter the outsourced cleaning market. However, employers are faced with the challenge of securing the services of a motivated, reliable and trustworthy team of domestic workers. Housecleaning service companies' success largely depends on the quality of the workers and the skills and

abilities they bring to the job according to the company's and clients' standards and expectations. It is therefore important to understand how employers of housecleaning service companies go about employing the right team of domestic workers for their company. What factors do employers take into consideration when jobseekers apply for a job in a housecleaning service company and when do they reject applicants? One way to look at this issue is to focus on statistical discrimination as a theoretical framework that may provide some insights into how employers screen, select and recruit job-seeking domestic workers.

3   Statistical discrimination and soft skills

Valuable research contributions have been made with regard to the use by employers of statistical discrimination as a tool in the recruitment and selection of jobseekers. In the workplace, statistical discrimination broadly refers to how employers exclude jobseekers from certain jobs on the basis of their observable physical characteristics such as gender, race, immigration status, ethnicity and/or age (Fang & Moro 2011:135; Bonoli & Hinrichs 2010:7). Applicants are often assessed based on previous experiences of employers or societal prejudices. Employers may also decide not to include applicants for certain jobs or positions, because the applicants possess certain physical characteristics (Norman 2003:615). This practice is believed to be a practical, cost-effective and time-saving tool that employers often use in screening applicants (Wang 2015:531).

If employers believe that a minority group will perform worse or pose a higher risk for the firm than the dominant group, even though both groups have identical experience or qualifications, then the minority group will probably be discriminated against or treated differently in the screening, selection and recruitment process from the dominant group (Fang & Moro 2011:135). Minority applicants that are frequently targeted include older applicants, women, disabled and immigrant applicants or those who have a criminal record and are often not considered when applying for a job. For example, an immigrant black woman above the age of fifty who has difficulty in speaking the local language may be less successful in getting a job than a younger native-born applicant with similar experience and qualifications (Bonoli & Hinrichs 2010:7). Employers therefore use statistical discrimination as a tool when making decisions regarding hiring, task assignment and/or promotion within the firm and as the basis for excluding certain groups in this process.

However, in many low-skilled jobs, particularly in the services sector, workers often have similar demographic backgrounds in respect of race and gender, with similar educational levels and experience. One could argue that the outward physical characteristics of jobseekers are less important. What is more important is their so-called "soft skills", which commonly consist of interpersonal skills, motivation, personality, commitment, proficiency in a certain language and a positive attitude (Bonoli & Hinrichs 2010). With particular low-skilled service jobs, including positions as cashiers, bartenders, waiters, call centre workers – and domestic workers, one could argue that certain soft skills possessed by workers are of significance. In other words, how well a future worker gets along with customers, co-workers, managers, supervisors and employers is especially important, as jobs of this nature require workers to interact either face-to-face or voice-to-voice with others. They are often required to engage in emotional labour and to a lesser extent aesthetic labour.

Emotional labour refers to "the effort, planning and control needed to express organisationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions", and aesthetic labour

refs to the appearance of workers (Morris & Feldman 1996:987; See also Hochschild 1983; Noon, Blyton & Morrell 2013; Bolton 2000). Workers must be presentable, have a friendly approach and a positive attitude when communicating with customers, which is often considered to be a skill.

A recent study by Bonoli and Hinrich (2010:11–19) revealed that employers use statistical discrimination as a tool in recruitment for low-skilled jobs in Europe. This study shows that jobseekers who are older, have a certain immigration status or who have been unemployed for long periods are often excluded from jobs or positions within service firms. These groups of jobseekers are also more likely to be given a trial period with the firm where they are employed on a short-term temporary basis to test whether they meet the required standards.

Abrantes (2014) found that gender plays a significant part in the recruitment of domestic workers by housecleaning service companies in Portugal. For example, in this study Abrantes (2014) found that all housecleaning service companies, with the exception of one, employ only women as domestic workers, while men are employed as drivers or maintenance workers within the firm. When applicants are screened, they have to present the employer with a curriculum vitae, past referrals or references and a statement of any criminal record. Apart from these requirements, it was found that employers focus specifically on two aspects during the face-to-face interview, namely technical and personal skills. Technical skills include the applicant's previous job experience in the field of domestic work, and personal skills include having a neat appearance, pleasant attitude, communication skills and an aptitude for teamwork (Abrantes 2014:437). Employers often prefer workers to fall into a certain "age bracket", and older jobseekers are often excluded from positions.

In South Africa, research into the domestic work sector and domestic workers has mainly focused on exploitative working conditions, unequal employment relationships between employers and domestic workers and more recently ineffective labour law protections for domestic workers (see Cock 1980; Fish 2006; King 2007; Ally 2010). Few studies have focused on the growth in the number of outsourced housecleaning service companies, which changes domestic work into a service industry where domestic workers render a professional cleaning service to customers. Whether employers of housecleaning service companies in South Africa use statistical discrimination in the selection and recruitment process remains an unanswered question and this study hopes to fill this void to some extent by focusing on a small number of housecleaning service companies in Johannesburg.

4 Methodology

4.1 *Research design, problem and objectives*

This study is located within the qualitative research paradigm. My epistemological understanding of how managers of outsourced housecleaning service companies might use statistical discrimination as a selection and recruitment tool was guided by interpretivist ontology. Interpretivism is rooted in Max Weber's concept of *verstehen* (understanding) of social life. It is concerned with understanding participants' views and the meanings they attach to everyday life (Babbie & Mouton 2001; Sarantakos 2005:40). The interpretivist paradigm was thought to be the most appropriate approach since the subject of the selection and recruitment practices of managers of outsourced housecleaning service companies is under-researched. The aim of this research was to

uncover the interpretations and meanings that managers of seven outsourced housecleaning service companies in Johannesburg attach to the selection and recruitment practices of job-seeking domestic workers and then to try to determine whether these managers use statistical discrimination as a selection and recruitment tool and what this means for job-seeking domestic workers seeking employment in the outsourced housecleaning service market.

The research question in this study is twofold: "Do employers of housecleaning service companies use statistical discrimination as a tool in the recruitment and selection of domestic workers for their company, and if so, what are their reasons for doing so?" To answer this question, the first objective of this study is to reflect on the perspectives of managers of housecleaning service companies on the recruitment and selection strategies they implement in screening job-seeking domestic workers. This objective will enable the researcher to understand whether employers of housecleaning service companies use statistical discrimination in the recruitment and selection process. Are the demographics of job-seeking domestic workers such as race, gender, immigration status, long-term unemployment and/or age important? The second objective focuses on whether soft skills of domestic workers are important and if so, what types of soft skills are particularly significant in the recruitment process. Identifying the types of soft skills employers of housecleaning service companies look for in potential job-seeking domestic workers may provide a better understanding as to why employers recruit domestic workers with certain skills.

4.2   *Case and site selection*

In case study research the investigator explores a case or multiple cases such as programmes, events, activities, processes or one or more individuals in their natural settings over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple data collection procedures such as observations, interviews, audio-visual material, documents and reports (Creswell 2003:15; Yin 2009:18). The use of a case study as an empirical research method is especially important in the context of outsourced housecleaning service companies as little knowledge exists on how these housecleaning service companies operate in terms of selection and recruitment. The selection of a number of cases (housecleaning service companies) may contribute to a better understanding of the underlying strategies managers of selected housecleaning service companies use in the selection and recruitment processes and the challenges that job-seeking domestic workers face on a daily basis.

Johannesburg as the site for the research was selected for a number of reasons. First, various historical studies, such as Van Onselen's (1982) study on the social and economic history of domestic workers and Ally's (2010) study on domestic workers and the state, were carried out in Johannesburg, thereby proving the value of a context-specific investigation of this sector. Johannesburg was therefore chosen as the research site for this study in order to build on previous seminal work. Secondly, the type of housecleaning services offered in Johannesburg are consistent with the national profile of this sector.

4.3   *Population frame, sampling selection and collection of data*

There are many types of outsourced cleaning companies in South Africa, offering various types of services. The housecleaning service companies operating in Johannesburg are similar to others found elsewhere in South Africa. This study only includes housecleaning service companies that render general cleaning services to private households and not

care work, office cleaning, maintenance work or general janitorial services. It is not known how many housecleaning service companies there are in South Africa in general or Johannesburg in particular, but an intensive search on the internet revealed that most housecleaning service companies render general cleaning and laundry services to private households.

Constructing a database of all housecleaning service companies operating in Johannesburg proved a challenge. Although StatsSA provides some indication of the number of employed domestic workers in South Africa, it does not provide the total number of housecleaning service companies nor the number of domestic workers employed through such companies. For this reason, a database had to be created before the reflective selection of housecleaning service companies could commence. An extensive search on the internet via various advertising platforms such as OLX and Gumtree was conducted. Since most housecleaning service companies advertise on the internet, it seemed best to start there. Keywords such as "housecleaning services in Johannesburg"; "Domestic cleaning services in Johannesburg" and "Maid services in Johannesburg" were used. While this search provided details of numerous housecleaning service companies available in Johannesburg, it was very difficult to construct a database. Various types of housecleaning companies were found by these search engines, such as upholstery cleaning, pre-post cleaning services, general maintenance services, janitorial services and many other types of domestic cleaning services. Some companies just provide a contact number but no information regarding their location or the types of cleaning services they provide. A large number of housecleaning service companies are turned up by various search engines and eliminating duplicates was time-consuming and a challenge. Although it was not impossible, compiling a population framework from these search engines would have been an overwhelming task.

The next step was to try to ease this process by searching for housecleaning service companies by a different search method. I decided to look at the map of Johannesburg and to divide it into three sections: Central and Northern Johannesburg; Eastern Johannesburg; and Western Johannesburg. Five keywords based on international literature on housecleaning companies were used: "Housecleaning services"; "Domestic cleaning services"; "Maid services"; "Domestic maid services" and "Household cleaning services". From this, a database of 42 housecleaning service companies was compiled. The database captured information such as company name, address, contact information, years of existence and type of services. While I acknowledge that there are probably many more housecleaning service companies in Johannesburg, and it was impossible to know the exact number of housecleaning service companies operating in Johannesburg at that time (as many come and go), this database at least provided me with some information on the types of housecleaning service companies in Johannesburg and the types of services they rendered.

Seven housecleaning service companies that offer general cleaning services to clients in Johannesburg were selected from this database. The sample of these seven housecleaning service companies was selected with the aid of purposive sampling methods. The companies selected included two that provide clients with a team of domestic workers, three that provide clients with one domestic worker for a few hours and two that place domestic workers with clients on a permanent basis.

Open-ended interviews were conducted with the employers of these seven selected housecleaning companies. Five managers were white women, one manager was a black woman and one manager was a white man. All interviews were conducted face-to-face

with managers in their offices. Interviews focused on three general themes: Background of the housecleaning service company, profile of workers and recruitment and selection procedures.

4.4 *Pilot study*

Since it was not known whether managers of selected housecleaning service companies in Johannesburg use statistical discrimination as a selection and recruitment tool, a pilot study was conducted prior to the main study. The manager of a leading housecleaning service company in Johannesburg gave me access to 83 successful application forms of employed domestic workers. The application forms of domestic workers included information such as race, gender, age, dress size, immigration status and employment history. Table 1 reflects the profile of successful domestic workers in this leading housecleaning service company:

Table 1
The mean of the characteristics of 83 employed domestic workers in a
housecleaning service company

Employed domestic workers	Race	Gender	Mean age	Mean dress size	Immigration status	Employment history
Frequency [N=83] and percentage	Black: 81 = 98% Indian: 1 = 1% Coloured: 1 = 1% White: 0 = 0%	Male: 2 = 2% Female: 81 = 98%	40 years	36	South African: 72 = 87% Zimbabwean: 11 = 13%	Unemployed since 2011: 13 = 16% Unemployed since 2012: 47 = 57% Unemployed since 2013: 14 = 17% Unemployed since 2014: 9 =10%

Table 1 shows that the vast majority of successful domestic applicants in this housecleaning service company are black South African women, with an average age of 40 years. The majority of them had not been unemployed for more than three years before getting a job in the housecleaning service company. But this information is just an average for successful applicants at one housecleaning service company in Johannesburg and a more in-depth understanding of the selection and recruitment strategies used by managers of selected housecleaning service companies in Johannesburg is necessary.

4.5 *Limitations and recommendations for future research*

There are some limitations to this study: First, the size of the sample is small and one cannot assume that all housecleaning service companies in South Africa use similar screening, selection and recruitment strategies when employing job-seeking domestic workers. However, the aim of this study is to explore how selected housecleaning service companies operate in Johannesburg and findings in respect of housecleaning companies in other areas in South Africa might differ substantially. Secondly, domestic workers' views on the selection and recruitment processes were not taken into consideration and further research is recommended to provide a more nuanced picture of different parties' views on these processes.

4.6 *Data recording and analysis*

A digital voice recording device was used to record all interviews with managers. To analyse these recordings, Creswell (2003:191-195) proposes the following six-step analysis for qualitative data: 1. Transcribe interviews, 2. Read and reread through the transcripts to get a general sense of the data obtained from the interviews, 3. Code or categorise data into similar themes and give these categories labels, 4. Use the coding process to generate a detailed description of the setting, people or themes for analysis, 5. Describe how the themes will be represented in a qualitative narrative using a narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis and 6. Interpret the data.

The above-mentioned recommendations were used to analyse the data. Important themes were selected from the transcribed interviews, pilot study and literature. The data were coded into various relevant themes. The themes selected were: gender and race; age; immigration status; long-term unemployment; technical skills; and personal skills and appearance.

4.7 *Ethical considerations*

Participation in this study was voluntary and all participants were informed about the aims and goals of this study. Participants were informed that they could refuse to answer questions they felt uncomfortable with and that they could withdraw from the study at any point if they wanted to. Participants were also asked if they felt comfortable about the fact that interviews were recorded and only one participant was unwilling to have the interview to be recorded. However, this participant allowed me to take notes during the interview. Furthermore, confidentiality was ensured by using pseudonyms for housecleaning service companies and participants. Recordings, notes and transcripts have been stored in a secure place that only the researcher has access to.

5 Findings

5.1 *Selection and recruitment*

Typical characteristics of statistical discrimination that employers focus on during the screening process are age, immigration status and long-term unemployment of low-skilled applicants. Bonoli and Hinrichs (2010:11) argue that these three characteristics are important factors that employers take into consideration in the selection and recruitment process. For example, this group of workers have to make more compromises than the dominant group to gain employment, often by accepting lower wages or longer working hours, or they face the risk of remaining unemployed for longer than others. In the context of domestic work in South Africa, one could add gender and race to these characteristics, as well as technical and personal skills.

5.1.1 *Gender and race*

In South Africa, paid domestic work is traditionally performed by women, usually black Africans, for reasons rooted in the apartheid and colonial past (Van Onselen 1982; Ally 2010). In terms of gender, it was found that all employers at housecleaning service companies in this study only employ women as domestic workers. Employer D said:

I do not employ men. But that is a personal thing and I tell you why. Not to say that my ladies will never do it, but I cannot have a clear conscious of putting a man into someone's home, a woman's home. Unfortunately I am painting them with the same brush, but you

never know (referring to sexual harassment or rape). It is a bit risky to me and I don't want to take that risk. People don't feel comfortable with that.

One could argue that male applicants seeking a job as domestic workers at housecleaning service companies are statistically discriminated against based on their gender. However, some male applicants may be employed as drivers or called upon when pre- and/or post-moving housecleaning is required. Interestingly, it seems that applicants are not discriminated against because of their race, but employer F explained the true nature of the selection process: "It is not that we only employ Black women as domestic cleaners, but in the few years that I am the employer here, no White woman has ever came through that door and asked for a job". Employer C said that she employed two White women as domestic workers, but they only worked for the company in that capacity for a short period of time:

> *They were unschooled, uneducated. The one had standard 4 (Grade 6). And if I was the client, I would have asked for the Black worker to work for me and not the White worker ... They did not stay long ... The one got employed as a secretary or something.*

Similar sentiments were echoed by the other employers. For example, employer F said: "Too many Africans are still available, and let me be honest, if you are White, who will work for a salary of R 2 500 per month, from eight in the morning to five in the afternoon, cleaning houses?" When asked if the profile of workers has changed since she started this company a few years ago, she said: "Zip-zero. Nothing has changed in 17 years. All our cleaners are Black women. And I don't see how this will change in the next fifty years or so". Statements of this kind imply that paid domestic work in South Africa is still mainly considered a black woman's job.

5.1.2 *Age*

It could be argued that age is another factor that employers use to statistically discriminate against applicants. The physical nature of domestic work, which commonly includes sweeping and vacuuming floors, polishing wooden furniture, washing windows, standing on ladders to dust lights, pushing furniture away from walls to clean, standing for long hours to do ironing and so forth, requires a worker who is physically able to do these tasks (Ally 2010; Glenn 1992:7). In addition to these tasks, one of the key features of housecleaning service companies is that they render fast and efficient cleaning services to clients. It was found in this study that age is a factor that employers use to statistically discriminate against applicants. For example, employer G said: "I don't employ a woman older than fifty, because they are not flexible enough" (referring to the requirement of adapting to young clients' needs). Two employers said that they do not employ anyone older than fifty-five years of age. Reasons such as "they are not coping" or "they are unreliable" were given. This implies that job-seeking domestic workers above the age of fifty may find it challenging to find employment as a domestic worker and that some employers may statistically discriminate against job-seeking domestic workers above this age.

Interestingly, employer C said she does not employ women below the age of twenty-five years, because they tend to have an "attitude". She explained: "I rather work with someone that is uneducated than one that is half educated. These young girls think they are educated, and it is very difficult to work with them". However, the other employers only discriminate against women older than fifty years of age. Only employer F said that she would consider an applicant who was fifty-five years of age "if I know she can cope with the demands of the job".

5.1.3 *Immigration status*

Apart from the age of applicants, immigration status is another factor that employers consider in the selection and recruitment process. Many cross-border migrant workers from neighbouring countries such as Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Botswana and Mozambique do not have a South African identity document (ID) or a work permit, making it illegal for them to work (Griffin 2011:85). Nevertheless, many employers employ foreigners illegally to avoid dealing with labour laws when employing South African nationals (McMahon 2014). But foreigners also have rights in the workplace, as the Labour Relations Act stipulates that all employees in South Africa have the right not to be unfairly dismissed (Israelstam 2015). Since 2008, the ambit of the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) has included foreign workers employed "illegally" in South Africa. This gives migrant workers in all sectors, including the domestic work sector, rights in that they can dispute unfair dismissals (Griffin 2011:86). This means that employing foreign nationals as domestic workers can be risky for some employers. Not only do foreign workers have rights under the Labour Relations Act, but employers can also face a fine for breaching the Immigration Act, if workers do not have a valid ID and work permit.

Interviews with employers at housecleaning service companies reveal that all South African applicants must have an ID prior to being interviewed by employers and all foreign nationals must provide employers with a valid work permit. The importance of the immigration status of job-seeking domestic workers appears to differ from one housecleaning service company to the next. However, on average the majority of housecleaning service companies in this sample have more South African employees than foreign nationals. Different reasons were given. For example, employer D said that foreign nationals are problematic to employ and she prefers to employ South African women as domestic workers:

> *We reject an applicant if she is a Zimbabwean. Based on our previous experiences, they tend to steal and they don't have a nice attitude. They don't get along with our other workers or our clients. For this reason, I don't employ Zimbabweans in my company often.*

Similar sentiments were shared by employer C, who said the following:

> *Zimbabweans are on average better workers. They are more loyal and reliable than our girls (referring to South African domestic workers). But the problem is they want to go home Decembers, to their family. And we work December … December and January are our busiest months.*

Only housecleaning service company B has more Zimbabwean domestic workers than South Africans. Employer B said:

> *You know, funny enough most of our girls are Zimbabweans, I don't know why … Sixty to seventy percent are Zimbabweans. About thirty percent are South Africans. I think because they come from Zimbabwe. They come here with one purpose and that is to work for their families. So they are focused. They want to go home with something. South Africans … I do not want to blame this thing they get ... What do you call it … Grant. Child support grant. We sometimes think that the grant thing has something to do with it. Zimbabwean women do not get this, so they have to work to get money. They are desperate for work.*

However, employers who employ Zimbabweans ask them for a "valid work permit and if they do not have one, they will not be considered for a job". It seems that job-seeking Zimbabwean women are statistically discriminated against in some housecleaning service companies. Those who are considered for employment must present a valid work permit as a prerequisite for employment as a domestic worker in one of these companies.

5.1.4 *Long-term unemployed*

Bonoli and Hinrichs (2010) argue that long-term unemployment is another factor that some employers use to statistically discriminate against jobseekers in low-skilled jobs. One way to test whether an applicant has been unemployed for a relatively long time is to ask for references from past employers. It was found that this is crucial in determining whether an applicant will be recruited within the housecleaning service company. As employer D said:

> *We definitely require references. Contactable references. We follow up on all references. CV's not really. We used to, but there is obviously a company out there who do all the CV's for them and charges them a fortune. And it is a lot of crap. A lot of rubbish. Any rubbish is put on there.*

The other employers also indicated that they check past references of jobseekers. One can therefore argue that the longer a person is unemployed, the more difficult it may be for that person to find a job. In this case, employers rely on written references to ascertain for what period an applicant has been unemployed and for what reasons she is unemployed.

In addition, employer E uses the social networks of currently employed domestic workers to supply recommendations of trustworthy workers when necessary. She said:

> *It does not matter if they are unemployed for a long time. If I need another cleaner in my company I usually ask my most trustworthy worker if she has a sister or other family member that can work for me. They always have. I trust her, because if she does not perform well, then her name will be dragged through the mud.*

Only employer, G, uses social networks as a recruitment strategy. One could argue that social networks are a practical tool to save employers' time by eliminating the interviewing process as employers trust recommendations by current workers.

In addition to examining the demographic background and job history of applicants or using social network strategies, employers rely on the technical and personal skills of applicants.

5.1.5 *Technical skills*

Although domestic work is considered an unskilled job by many (Cock 1980), it appears that the technical skills of applicants are important in the selection and recruitment process for individuals seeking employment in housecleaning service companies. Employer B said:

> *We ask for a copy of any type of certificate. They do these courses. These three day child minding courses or cooking courses … All those courses are jumping up and down. Some of them are not good enough but that is none of our business. They come with that certificate and we call the owner of that training institution and ask if so and so trained with her or whatever.*

One could argue that applicants with better technical skills are in a better position to be considered for employment in a housecleaning service company. There is high unemployment in South Africa in general, and this applies to the domestic work sector as well. Applicants with experience and skills are more likely to be successful.

Apart from external courses available for job-seeking domestic workers, it was found in this study that employers at housecleaning service companies usually test certain technical skills, such as whether an applicant can iron. Employer D said:

> *I do have an ironing board here and every now and again we do spot checks. Everybody says they iron brilliantly. So every now and again I will rip out the ironing*

*board and say iron a shirt. I actually have a shirt in the car that I scrunch up for a few
days and then ask them to iron it. But that is also part of our in-house training.*

Another employer said her company usually provides in-house training to all workers as
"this is a professional company and the name of the company is at stake".

5.1.6 *Personal skills and appearances*

Another factor that employers at housecleaning service companies in this study take into
consideration during the selection and recruitment process is the personal skills of
applicants. Since housecleaning service companies render a professional cleaning
service to clients, professionalism, motivation and trustworthiness are important factors
that need to be taken into consideration when employing jobseekers. Domestic workers
must be able to communicate well with clients and understand what they want. In this
regard, employer C explained:

*According the law we cannot discriminate. We cannot discriminate against someone
without an eye or a leg … But I do look at obesity. Our clients are mostly upper middle-
class and they live in big houses … Double story houses. She will have to climb those
stairs five, six times a day. And if she can't climb over these two steps (leading to the
office), then how will she be able to climb those stairs in the two story houses.*

Employers also said that they appreciate it when job-seeking domestic workers show
"enthusiasm", "energy" and "some spark" during the interview. Appearances play an
important role in the recruitment process as employers statistically discriminate against
someone who does not look attractive. Employer A said:

*Appearances are obviously important. … I am a little bit fussy … I will always make
some comments on the form. I will write there that she is overweight. Or she has teeth
missing or whatever. Because generally customers do say that appearances are
important. And you have to work with that person from seven to five.*

These statements imply that personal appearance is an important factor in the selection
and recruitment process. Some employers may discriminate against applicants on the
grounds of physical appearance.

Table 2
Summary of the profile of domestic workers currently employed
in the seven housecleaning service companies

Employer	Gender and race	Age (not older than)	Immigration status	Long-term unemployment
A	Only black women	N/A	25 % Zimbabweans 75 % South Africans	< 3 years – References are important
B	Only black women	N/A	60 – 70 % Zimbabweans 30 – 40 % South Africans	< 3 years – References are important
C	Only black women with the exception of 2 white women	25 < 50	10 – 20 % Zimbabweans 80 – 90 % South Africans	< 3 years – References are important
D	Only black women	< 50	10 % Zimbabweans 90 % South Africans	Varies – depending on the reference
E	Only black women	< 50	N/A	Use social networks
F	Only black women	< 55	50 % Zimbabweans 50 % South Africans	N/A (Train domestic workers in-house)
G	Only black women	< 50	10 % Zimbabweans 90 % South Africans	Use social networks

Table 3
Summary of the technical and personal skills and appearances
of job-seeking domestic workers

Employer	Technical skills	Personal skills	Appearance
A	Ironing skills	Friendly	Not overweight Clean appearance No missing teeth
B	Ironing skills	Friendly, must be able to adapt to clients from different socio-economic and racial backgrounds	Smart looking Old fashioned
C	Past references are called to check for technical skills	Proud, passionate, confident honest, reliable, punctual, loyal	Not overweight No chronic illnesses
D	Ironing skills but also do in-house training	Friendly, easy-going	No major disabilities such as missing hands or feet (Must be able to do the job. Currently have a domestic worker with a cleft palate.)
E	N/A (Do specific in-house training)	Hard-working, team worker, positive attitude	Clean appearance
F	N/A (Do specific in-house training)	Willing to learn new skills, adequate communication skills	Neat and clean appearance
G	N/A	Team worker, leadership skills	N/A

6   Discussion and conclusion

Although this paper only reflects the views of seven employers at housecleaning service companies in Johannesburg, there is some evidence that employers at housecleaning service companies use statistical discrimination techniques. The observable traits of applicants that employers of housecleaning service companies most strongly use to evaluate candidates include gender, race and age as well as physical appearance, including whether the candidate is overweight.

Black African women below the age of fifty are the preferred candidates for employment. Employers mainly said that older workers do not cope well, are unreliable and do not adapt well to the changing needs of clients. This means that jobseekers above the age of fifty may find employment as domestic workers through housecleaning service companies challenging. Applicants are also statistically discriminated against in terms of gender. Men are seldom employed as domestic workers in South Africa, and this seems to apply in housecleaning service companies as well. It appears that employers may reject male jobseekers altogether as domestic workers in their housecleaning service company and may employ some as drivers or when they are needed in pre- and post-moving cleaning. Long-term unemployment may work against an applicant in some cases as it was revealed that employers at housecleaning service companies do check references and may call past employers. If an applicant does not have a written reference or if a past employer has negative things to say about the applicant, then she may be rejected for the job.

Immigration status is another factor that some employers at housecleaning service companies take into consideration during the selection and recruitment process. Only one housecleaning service company employs more Zimbabwean women than South African women. All other housecleaning service companies in this study employ mainly

South African women. Trust and theft issues, unpleasant attitudes and unwillingness to work with co-workers were given as reasons why Zimbabwean women are seldom employed by the housecleaning service companies included in this study.

Employers also statistically discriminate against jobseekers by looking at the physical appearance of applicants. For example, applicants must have a neat appearance, no missing teeth and no chronic illnesses. In particular, employers discriminate against overweight applicants. Some employers do not employ overweight applicants as domestic workers as the nature of the job may require a physical fit person. This means that even though some of the overweight applicants may be better domestic workers than slim domestic workers, they are statistically discriminated against. Overweight applicants in particular may therefore find it challenging to find employment in housecleaning service companies.

Since domestic work is considered a low-skilled job (Cock 1980; Ally 2010), it was anticipated that technical skills of applicants may not be a strong indicator of whether they find employment. However, this study found that technical skills such as having some training in cooking or child-minding may work in favour of an applicant. It was found that some employers of housecleaning service companies ask applicants for a "certificate of some sort", which may place these applicants in a better position than those who do not have training. Personal skills such as motivation, intelligence and enthusiasm are factors in the selection and recruitment process. One could argue that applicants who lack these personal skills are statistically discriminated against, although in theory they may be better domestic workers.

Social networks are a valuable tool used by some employers in the selection and recruitment process as they may save employers time that would have to be spent on going through the "nitty-gritty" detail of the company's vision and mission or even make it possible to eliminate the interview process altogether. It can be assumed that the employee who recommends the family member or friend to the employer would have informed the recommended candidate about the expectations of the employer and/or clients. One could also argue that the reputation of the current worker who recommended someone is at stake as she may take pride in being asked by the employer to recommend someone. Although the other employers did not indicate that they rely on social networks using current domestic workers, this may be a valuable strategy for some employers at housecleaning service companies.

To conclude, this study adds to our knowledge of statistical discrimination to some extent by showing that employers at housecleaning service companies use statistical discrimination as a selection and recruitment tool. Employers dislike dismissals, particularly in the domestic work sector, where domestic workers are protected by the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA). The use of statistical discrimination as a selection and recruitment tool minimises the risk of employing the wrong person for the job. It seems that housecleaning service companies have a specific profile of workers: They need to be black South African women below the age of fifty years, have a pleasant attitude and not be overweight. Although this may be beneficial for employers, for job-seeking domestic workers it means that housecleaning service companies do not necessarily create more employment for them, since some groups of jobseekers are statistically discriminated against in the domestic work sector. This means that job-seeking domestic workers who do not fit these requirements may find employment in housecleaning service companies challenging.

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