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# Political Skill: Explaining the Effects of Nonnative Accent on Managerial Hiring and Entrepreneurial Investment Decisions

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We propose and test a new theory explaining glass-ceiling bias against nonnative speakers as driven by perceptions that nonnative speakers have weak political skill. Although nonnative accent is a complex signal, its effects on assessments of the speakers' political skill are something that speakers can actively mitigate; this makes it an important bias to understand. In Study 1, White and Asian nonnative speakers using the same scripted responses as native speakers were found to be significantly less likely to be recommended for a middle-management position, and this bias was fully mediated by assessments of their political skill. The alternative explanations of race, communication skill, and collaborative skill were nonsignificant. In Study 2, entrepreneurial start-up pitches from national high-technology, new-venture funding competitions were shown to experienced executive MBA students. Nonnative speakers were found to have a significantly lower likelihood of receiving new-venture funding, and this was fully mediated by the coders' assessments of their political skill. The entrepreneurs' race, communication skill, and collaborative skill had no effect. We discuss the value of empirically testing various posited reasons for glass-ceiling biases, how the importance and ambiguity of political skill for executive success serve as an ostensibly meritocratic cover for nonnative speaker bias, and other theoretical and practical implications of this work.

*Keywords:* nonnative accent, political skill, managerial hiring, entrepreneurship, investment decisions

Nonnative speakers of English are common in the workforce throughout the world, but those studying organizational behavior and human resources management have only recently begun to understand the effects of nonnative accent on the speaker's opportunities and performance. Two trends make this an increasingly important issue. First, the United Nations (2010) reported that 214 million people—one out of every 33 people in the world today—work in a country other than their birth country, with immigrants working at all occupational levels and in virtually every country in the world. Second, English increasingly has become the “language of business” throughout the world, with an estimated one billion nonnative speakers of English (Cook, 1999) in the workplace.

Nonnative speakers of English experience discrimination (see Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010, for a review), particularly for executive positions, yet those who study workplace discrimination have not developed nor tested any systematic theory about why such a “glass-ceiling effect” occurs.

The effects of nativism, or a bias against immigrants, on the employment prospects of immigrants has long been studied in economics and the social sciences (e.g., Borjas, 1999, for a review). However, most scholars have focused on wage differentials between natives and immigrants, and they are only beginning to study any possible biases that might affect successful immigrants who want to move to more responsible positions. Scholars studying discrimination that blocks those with performance-irrelevant characteristics from attaining elite positions have labeled this a glass-ceiling effect. A glass ceiling has been defined by the U.S. Department of Labor as a racial or gender difference that is not explained by other job-relevant characteristics of the employee, that is greater at higher organizational levels, and that involves an inequality of the chances of advancement to higher organizational levels (U.S. Department of Labor, 1995). The term refers to invisible, not explicit, barriers in which members of certain groups come close to attaining elite positions but cannot reach them. Although the term was first applied to women, glass-ceiling effects have been found for many other minorities and in settings as widespread as the military, new-technology ventures, and religious communities. There has long been debate about the various causes of glass-ceiling effects, yet all research suggests that bias is

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organizational work. Ferris et al. (2005) defined it as the ability to effectively understand others and to use this knowledge to influence them to achieve their own or an organization's objectives. This concept and measure consist of four components: interpersonal influence, social astuteness, networking ability, and apparent sincerity. Scholars using Ferris et al.'s (2005) construct and measure have made important contributions (see Ferris & Treadway, 2012, for a review).

Pfeffer (1992) and Sayles (1989) argued, and Piven (2008) found, that political skill is critical to managerial effectiveness. Mintzberg's (1973) classic study of managerial work emphasized the importance of interpersonal effectiveness through such managerial roles as "leader," "liaison," "disturbance handler," and "negotiator." Virtually all management texts claim that a manager's work is to operate effectively by securing resources and support for the subordinate group and organization (e.g., Pearce, 2012). Further, there is substantial research demonstrating that the ability to be politically skillful in complex interpersonal environments becomes more important to success as managers assume more executive responsibilities (Bass, 1990). For example, Gentry, Gilmore, Porter, and Leslie (2012) found that managers with stronger political skill were rated as more promotable by both their peers and their own managers. Kaplan (2008) found that political skill predicted a higher hierarchical position and income in a later period, as did Blickle, Schneider, Liu, and Ferris (2011). Finally, Semadar, Robins, and Ferris (2006) found that political skill more strongly differentiated top managerial performers than did self-monitoring, emotional intelligence, and leadership self-efficacy. Thus, political skill is both ambiguous and unquestionably important to executive job performance, making it an ideal rationale for preferring native speakers in executive positions.

We propose that nonnative accent leads evaluators to assume that the candidate for executive position or funding will have insufficient political skill to be successful as an executive. First, linguists have found that nonnative-accented speakers are perceived to be less persuasive, dominant, and socially aware and so are judged less able to be influential than native speakers (Giles, 1973; Powesland & Giles, 1975; Ryan, Giles, & Sebastian, 1982). Further, Cargile and Bradac (2001) proposed that speakers with the accent of the dominant group are assumed to have more status and power. In addition, nonnative accent signals that the speaker is an immigrant, and it is possible that listeners will assume that immigrants have less knowledge of the subtle needs and preferences of locals, as well as a lesser understanding of the many norms around how and when to exert political influence. Although nonnative accent is a complex multifaceted signal, for the above reasons we propose that evaluators will judge nonnative speakers as having less political skill than native speakers and that this assessment will account for glass-ceiling biases against nonnative speakers by fully mediating the relationship between having a nonnative accent and reduced access to executive roles. Political skill is not the only skill relevant for success in executive positions; however, we believe that it is primarily their nonnative accent-based attributions of lower political skill that lead evaluators to be less likely to recommend or fund nonnative speakers for executive positions.

### Alternative Explanations for Nonnative Speaker Bias

A potentially wide range of personality, social status, and demographic characteristics has been found to discriminate between those managers rising to executive positions and those remaining in lower organizational positions (see Bass, 1990, for a review). Yet, it is not possible to test all conceivable attributes about nonnative speakers in one study. In this paper we test three plausible alternative explanations for why nonnative speakers have fewer executive opportunities: racism, fluency of speech or communication skill, and out-group bias.

First, racism: Many nonnative speakers are also from a different race than native speakers, and the power of racism is well documented (Brief et al., 2000; Charles & Nkomo, 2012). In both Kalin and Rayko's (1978) and De La Zerda and Hopper's (1979) studies of nonnative-speaker bias, all evaluators were from the same race or ethnic group. Although Hosoda et al.'s (2012) study included ethnically diverse evaluators, they did not explicitly compare or test for racial or ethnicity effects. Racism in hiring decisions has been well documented (Aubry, 1995; Braddock, Crain, McPartland, & Dawkins, 1986; Cole & Deskins, 1988; Hoch, 1993; Tavakolian, 1995). It is possible that bias against speakers with nonnative accents may be a surrogate for racism. Below we test whether it is racism or attributions about political skill that explain the glass-ceiling bias.

The second alternative explanation tested here is that of poor communication skill. We follow Ferris et al. (2005) in proposing that political skill and communication skill are distinct from one another (and will confirm it empirically in both studies). Although extremely poor speech fluency would likely undermine political skill, political skill includes a broader range of competencies: interpersonal influence, social astuteness, networking ability, and apparent sincerity.

Fluency of speech has figured prominently in linguistic research on accents (first documented by Burnett, 1951). Some confound these two constructs and see communication skill as a necessary component of political skill. For example, Pfeffer (1981) proposed effective advocacy and effective use of language (kinds of communication skill) as components of political skill. Adler (1987) proposed that nonnative speakers would not be likely to be selected for jobs that require strong communication skills. Cargile (1997) found that Chinese-accented applicants were disfavored for jobs that required "good communication skills." Interestingly, Hosoda and Stone-Romero (2010) found that communication skills did not affect nonnative speakers' opportunities for high-status positions, but certain accents did reduce the chances of obtaining a low-status job requiring good communication skills.

Executives are responsible for clearly communicating with their subordinates, peers, and outsiders. They represent the unit or organization and need to be articulate in communicating its mission and policies (Mintzberg, 1973). Following those theorists who strongly suggest that nonnative accent signals poor communication skill (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010), we test the alternative explanation that attributions about communication skill explain the effects of nonnative accent in both of the following studies.

Finally, political skill could be just one of the many attributions made by evaluators who see nonnative speakers as members of an out-group. For example, Hosoda et al. (2012) suggested, and Deaux (2006) found, that nonnative accent signals that the speaker is an out-group member. Whether that out-group assessment is

had a Japanese accent (nonnative accent, photo of the same Asian male; NNA), and a Russian national who had been living in the United States for 5 years and had a Russian accent (nonnative accent, photo of the same White male; NNW). Japanese and Russian accents were chosen because both nations are viewed as having strong technology education and industries. Although nonnative accents can vary from barely perceptible to strong, in this study, as in previous work in linguistics, the focus was on possible biases against equally qualified immigrants who communicate comfortably and clearly with marked accents. It was necessary to use different individuals playing the role of job candidate in order to treat the effects of race and to get authentic native and nonnative accents. Callan, Gallois, and Forbes (1983) have shown that actors instructed to portray accented speech tend to exaggerate accent differences, creating a phony impression that could itself influence rater judgments; Giles and Bourhis (1976) also have described other difficulties of using a bilingual speaker to play both roles.

Photos were chosen based on a separate pilot study with a nonoverlapping sample of 52 participants to test the attractive equivalence of the candidates. We presented participants with headshot photos of eight Asian males and eight White males in randomized order. Participants rated each photo on a 7-point measure of physical attractiveness. We chose the two photos that participants rated as moderately attractive (Asian male:  $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ; White male:  $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ) and conducted a final pilot study, with only these two photos selected, on a nonoverlapping sample of 26 participants. No significant differences were found in their rated attractiveness.

The scripts for the job candidate and the interviewer were identical in each audio recording, to provide lexical and grammatical consistency and to control syntax of what was said (language competence); the job candidates were of similar age, socioeconomic status, and educational background. After listening to the audio recording, the raters filled out a 38-item questionnaire and rated whether or not they would recommend hiring the candidate for the middle-management job. They also were asked to report demographic information about themselves. Raters were randomly assigned to one of four audio recordings, with 50 participants (20 male and 30 female) listening to the NW candidate; 44 participants (20 male and 24 female) listening to the NA candidate; 45 participants (19 male and 26 female) listening to the NNW candidate; and 40 participants (19 male and 21 female) listening to the NNA candidate.

A post-study manipulation check was conducted to test whether or not there was a difference in the candidates' perceived attractiveness, as well as a difference in intelligence or confidence, which might have confounded the experimental tests. There was no significant difference in judgments of the candidates' attractiveness, intelligence, or confidence. Finally, an analysis of variance was run to see the effects of gender on judgment to hire. The sex differences in ratings were not significant.

**Measures.** The measures used in Study 1 were analyzed with a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), in which we constructed a model with three factors (political skill, communication skill, and collaboration skill) loading separately (three-factor model:  $\chi^2 = 346.21$ ,  $p < .01$ , root-mean-square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .05, comparative fit index [CFI] = .92). We tested whether a more parsimonious two-factor model (collapsing com-

munication skill and political skill) or a one-factor model was a better fit to the data (two-factor model:  $\chi^2 = 482.05$ ,  $p < .01$ , RMSEA = .19, CFI = .86; one-factor model:  $\chi^2 = 903.16$ ,  $p < .01$ , RMSEA = .31, CFI = .74). These data demonstrate the convergent and discriminant validity of the political skill, collaborative skill, and communication skill scales used in this study. This supports our contention that communication skill is sufficiently distinct from political skill to suggest that the two be studied as separate possible explanations for the negative effects of nonnative accent on executive opportunities.

**Political skill.** Political skill was assessed with the full 18-item scale developed by Ferris et al. (2005), with participants rating items such as "the job candidate always seems to instinctively know the right things to say or do to influence others" and "the job candidate is particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others." For all items, individuals responded on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), with  $\alpha = .84$ . Although Ferris et al. conceptualized political skill as a multifaceted construct, they and others (e.g., Gentry et al., 2012) commonly conduct tests using the complete measure we also use (i.e., what they call "political skill total score").

**Communication skill.** Communication skill was measured by participants responding to the following questions: "To what extent is the job candidate able to communicate easily and effectively with others?" and "To what extent do you believe that the job candidate will communicate poorly with clients" (reverse-coded). Responses were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), with  $\alpha = .70$ .

**Collaborative skill.** Collaborative skill was assessed with a six-item scale adapted from Whetten and Cameron (1984), with high reliability here ( $\alpha = .91$ ). Participants rated the extent to which they agreed that the job candidate "works well with peers," "interacts effectively with members of other divisions," "keeps others informed," "works well with both men and women," "works well with the supervisors who report to him or her," and "gives positive feedback to employees" on a scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

**Hiring recommendation.** For the measure of hiring recommendation, participants responded to a single item: "If I were hiring for the position of marketing manager, I would consider this person the following type of candidate for the job: 1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = weak; 4 = good; 5 = very good; 6 = excellent." Means, standard deviations, and correlations between Study 1 variables are reported in Table 1.

Table 1  
Study 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

| Variable                 | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1     | 2     | 3     |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. Political skill       | 4.64     | .88       | (.84) |       |       |
| 2. Collaborative skill   | 4.62     | .63       | .49** | (.91) |       |
| 3. Communication skill   | 3.91     | .68       | .48** | .12   | (.70) |
| 4. Hiring recommendation | 3.32     | .89       | .50** | .36** | .44** |

Note. Cronbach alpha reliabilities are reported along the diagonal.

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

Yet, if entrepreneurs are to grow their organizations beyond small operations, allowing them to realize their aspirations for executive responsibilities, they often need access to investment funding, and it is possible that the biased assumptions about nonnative speakers' weak political skill may also lead new-venture investors to be less likely to invest in their businesses. Such assessments not only lead to nonmeritocratic blocked opportunities for the foreign-born but also risk the misallocation of capital to new ventures, undercutting a major source of economic growth. Study 2 allows us to see whether nonnative speakers also face biases in the investment community and extend the laboratory findings from Study 1 to actual entrepreneurs seeking funding for their new ventures. To address these questions and issues, we collected data from investors making investment decisions on the basis of entrepreneurial pitch competitions. Here, as in the previous studies, we propose that the nonnative speaker effect will be stronger than the effect of entrepreneur's race.

*S2 Hypothesis 1:* Speaking with a nonnative accent will lead to less likelihood of receiving new-venture funding.

Further, we expect the bias against funding the new entrepreneurial ventures of nonnative speakers will be fully mediated by assessments of the entrepreneur's political skill. We test our proposition against the alternative explanations that a nonnative accent leads to attributions of weak communication and general out-group antipathy, which explain less funding for the speakers' new ventures. Baron (2008) found that persuasiveness contributed to the breadth of entrepreneurs' social networks, which in turn increased their social capital and provided a higher probability of achieving success in new ventures. Persuasiveness is seen as a political skill by Pfeffer (1981) and Ferris et al. (2005), because entrepreneurs are required to work with prospective suppliers, customers, and financial backers; thus, investors are cognizant that entrepreneurs' ability to influence others is critical for venture success. We expect that a nonnative accent's signal that an entrepreneur has weaker political skill will fully mediate the effects of a nonnative accent on recommendations for new venture funding.

However, Baron and Markman (2000, 2003) found that self-reported accuracy and expressiveness were positively related to entrepreneurs' business incomes and their companies' sales revenues, suggesting the alternative explanation that communication skill attributions may explain accent's effects on new venture funding. Similarly, out-group antipathy may be more influential in new-venture funding decisions, because investors funding strangers provides considerable scope for generalized out-group antipathy. In Study 2 (S2) we test the three alternative hypotheses of racism, communication skill, and collaborative skill attributions as well as our hypothesized political skill explanation for glass-ceiling bias.

*S2 Hypothesis 2:* The negative effects of speaking with a nonnative accent on obtaining new-venture funding will be fully mediated by accent's effects on perceptions of the entrepreneur's political skill.

## Method

**Sample and procedure.** The sample consisted of 90 entrepreneurial pitches delivered in a 3-year period, at three top technology

pitch competitions in the United States, as rated by various technology forums and leading technology and entrepreneurship magazines. These pitch competitions consist of entrepreneurs who have founded their own start-up ventures and give 5- to 10-min presentations, or pitches, to a panel of initial-stage new-venture investors. The experienced investors judge these pitches for the quality of the idea and its investment potential and award investment money to the winners on the basis of the pitch. Pitch competitions are important events for entrepreneurs looking to develop their entrepreneurial ventures, and the investment money from them often represents the first infusion of cash in these early-stage ventures. Entrepreneurs also attend pitch competitions in order to receive mentoring, gain strategic advice, and develop connections. Several hundred people usually attend each competition.

All pitches collected as part of the sample were provided directly by the pitch competition or were downloaded from official pitch competition websites, with each pitch stored as an electronic video file. The pitch competition officials carefully monitored each entrepreneur, so that each pitch was limited to a set length. Each pitch was videotaped by professional cameramen from the pitch competition's video services department, and, as a result, the pitches have high-quality sound and picture.

In order to test the hypotheses, we divided videos into two groups based on whether the entrepreneur received or did not receive funding from the pitch competition, as determined by the actual competition judges. Because there were 10 to 15 times more entrepreneurs who did not receive funding than did so, a subset of losing entrepreneurs was randomly selected for ease of coding the disproportionately large group of entrepreneurs who did not win. Thus, the sample consisted of all videos from entrepreneurs who won investment funding and a randomly selected number of videos from entrepreneurs who did not win investment funding. The sample of losing entrepreneurs was stratified by competition, so that the proportion of losing and winning entrepreneurs sampled was equal across competitions. There were 90 videos in total, with 30 winning entrepreneurs and 60 randomly selected losing entrepreneurs included.

Sixty executive MBA or working, part-time MBA students who had taken at least one entrepreneurship course within the last 2 years at a large public university in the western United States assessed the entrepreneurs' accents, skills, and attractiveness. They had an average age of 37.4 years, with 15.3 average years of work experience at various levels, including associate, analyst, manager, director, and vice president positions; Of these MBA students, 25% came from sales/marketing, 26% from information systems, 20% from finance/accounting, 16% from operations/logistics, 6% from general management, 3% from consulting, 1% from human resources, and 3% from a variety of other functional backgrounds. Thirty-eight percent were born outside of the United States, with five different countries represented.

Each person coded three videos. Coders watched each video only one time; this is similar to a real-life pitch competition, where investors view each pitch only once. They were blind to the actual outcome of the pitch (i.e., whether or not the entrepreneur received funding). The pitch videos were randomly assigned, so that each coder did not necessarily see videos solely from one competition and was equally likely to have been randomly assigned any combination of winning and losing entrepreneurs. Coders received a

Table 4  
 Study 2 Hierarchical Logistic Regression Analysis of Entrepreneurial Funding on Race and Nonnative Accent

| Predictor                      | Entrepreneurial funding (received funding vs. did not receive funding) <sup>a</sup> |                 |        |         |                 |        |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------|--------|---------|-----------------|--------|
|                                | Model 1   |                 |        | Model 2 |                 |        |
|                                | $\beta$   | $\exp(\beta)^b$ | $SE^c$ | $\beta$ | $\exp(\beta)^b$ | $SE^c$ |
| Constant                       | -1.38*  | 0.25            | .84    | -.25    | 0.78            | .98    |
| Step 1: Control variables      |   |                 |        |         |                 |        |
| Age                            | 0.17  | 1.18            | .23    | .14     | 1.15            | .24    |
| Gender                         | 0.99  | 2.69*           | .47    | .78     | 2.18            | .48    |
| Attractiveness                 | 0.64  | 1.90**          | .17    | .65     | 1.92**          | .18    |
| Step 2                         |   |                 |        |         |                 |        |
| Race                           |   |                 |        | -.02    | 0.99            | .15    |
| Nonnative accent               |   |                 |        | -.27**  | 0.77            | .11    |
| -2 log likelihood              |   | 227.11          |        |         | 220.60          |        |
| Overall $\chi^2$               |   | 18.05           |        |         | 24.56**         |        |
| <i>df</i> for overall $\chi^2$ |   | 3               |        |         | 5               |        |
| pseudo $R^2$                   |   | .09             |        |         | .17             |        |
| $\Delta$ pseudo $R^2$          |   |                 |        |         | .08             |        |

Note.  $N = 90$ .  $SE$  = standard error; *df* = degrees of freedom.

<sup>a</sup>  $n = 30$  in the received funding condition and  $n = 60$  in the did not receive funding condition; received funding = 1; did not receive funding = 0. <sup>b</sup>  $\exp(\beta)$  is the odds ratio. <sup>c</sup> Standard error values for  $\beta$ .

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

direct effect = .04; 95% CI = -.02, .12) or communication skill (indirect effect = .02; 95% CI = -.03, .08) mediation of the accent-funding decision. Like hiring for executive positions in large organizations, for decisions about funding a new venture race, communication and collaborative skill attributions do not account for the effects of having a nonnative accent on recommendations for new venture funding, but political skill did. Therefore, S2 Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Because the dependent variable measured actual investment funding made by funders and not the coders, a manipulation check was conducted by asking the coders to rate each entrepreneur on likelihood of having received funding. For this funding decision manipulation check, they were asked, "To what extent do you believe the entrepreneur received funding

from this pitch competition?" with a score of 1 indicating not at all likely through 5 indicating that the entrepreneur was deemed extremely likely to have received funding. When linear regression was employed, results remained consistent (nonnative accent  $\beta = -.30$ ;  $p < .01$ , with this measure of funding; with political skill added, nonnative accent  $\beta = .03$ ; *ns*). This pattern provides further confidence that there is a mediation effect with perceived political skill, rather than race, communication skill, or collaboration skill attributions, driving the relationship between accent and entrepreneurial funding.

## Study 2 Discussion

Nonnative accent not only negatively influences managerial opportunities in established organizations but also negatively impacts funding opportunities for entrepreneurs. In Study 2, a nonnative accent reduced the chances of receiving funding for entrepreneurs in new-venture pitch competitions. This bias, again, was explained by the perceptions that the nonnative-accented entrepreneurs would have less political skill, not by their race or assessments of their communication or collaboration skill. Attributions of political skill apparently are as important to receiving new-venture funding as they are to accessing executive positions in established organizations. Study 2 extended the findings of Study 1 to an actual important decision-making context that affects nonnative speakers' opportunities for executive responsibilities by building their own entrepreneurial ventures.

## General Discussion and Conclusions

These studies tested a new theory explaining how glass-ceiling bias against immigrants as signaled by their nonnative accents operates. We proposed and found that raters judged candidates with nonnative accents for executive positions and those seeking

Table 5  
 Study 2 Effects of Nonnative Accent on Perceptions of Political Skill

| Predictor           | Political skill |        |        |
|---------------------|-----------------|--------|--------|
| Step 1: Controls    |                 |        |        |
| Age                 | -.03            | .02    | .01    |
| Gender              | .10             | .14*   | .08    |
| Race                | -.10            | -.05   | -.04   |
| Attractiveness      |                 | .45**  | .45**  |
| Step 2              |                 |        |        |
| Communication skill |                 | -.04   | -.05   |
| Collaborative skill |                 | -.15   | -.13   |
| Step 3              |                 |        |        |
| Nonnative accent    |                 |        | -.31** |
| <i>F</i>            | 1.58            | 6.15** | 8.22** |
| $R^2$               | .05             | .31    | .41    |
| $\Delta R^2$        |                 | .26**  | .10**  |
| Adjusted $R^2$      | .02             | .26    | .36    |

Note.  $N = 90$ .

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

skill, and it is also highly ambiguous: The numerous conceptualizations in the literature attest to the ambiguity of the idea of political skill. As both an ambiguous and an important executive skill, political skill has strong potential as a cover for discrimination. Just as modern racists refer to "culture" rather than openly acknowledging racism (Brief et al., 2000), political skill appears to be the ostensibly meritocratic vehicle for expressing national origin bias (Charles & Nkomo, 2012). We demonstrated its role here with nonnative accents, but it could just as easily be used to justify excluding others such as women and minorities from executive positions. How and why accents and other personal characteristics foster assessments of another's political skill, thus enabling a false meritocratic excuse for glass-ceiling discrimination, deserves further research attention.

Finally, this research contributes to our growing knowledge of the role of political skill in organizational behavior. Although political skill is clearly an important executive skill, previous systematic research on political skill has focused on nonexecutive employees. Our theorizing extends the concept into executive and entrepreneurial settings, ones where it could prove even more important than its established role in lower level employees' organizational behavior.

### Practical Implications

Despite legislation banning national-origin discrimination in the United States, these studies demonstrate that nonnative accent bias in executive hiring and entrepreneurial funding is a reality. With increased globalization of professional work, more candidate pools of qualified managers and entrepreneurs will include candidates who speak with nonnative accents. Are these individuals likely to be hired for technical jobs and the supervision of technical work but then discriminated against in future promotions? Or, as these individuals face glass-ceiling effects in their employment and so enter entrepreneurship, will they face discrimination in acquiring funding, forcing their businesses to remain small and self-funded? Our work suggests that prohibited national origin bias as signaled by nonnative accent bias in access to executive opportunities is real, and it also suggests possible approaches to addressing this problem.

One response to this challenge has been to suggest that those with nonnative accents should seek out training to help them to develop accents more closely approaching the standard for the society in which they work. However, changing one's accent is very difficult, and there is evidence that individuals who change their accents may incur social penalties from their immigrant group (Carranza & Ryan, 1975). Our research suggests a more realistic and probably more effective option for those with nonnative accents: they can seek to inoculate against this bias during job interviews or when seeking investment funding by specifically addressing the implicit assumptions uncovered here about assessments of their political skill. For example, they could find opportunities to signal strong political skill by statements such as, "I know some might think my accent means that I would be less willing to fight for resources; however, . . ." Ferris et al. (2005) have developed a reliable and valid assessment of political skill that could serve as a useful guide to those wanting to signal strong political skill when seeking executive positions or venture funding.

The implications for human resources management professionals are clear: an addition of accent-bias awareness to existing training programs for hiring managers. We are most troubled by the implications for executive search firms and the present form of investment pitch competitions. Organizations of all types are increasingly retaining executive search professionals to assist in their managerial hiring. These professionals often make judgments based on nothing more than a telephone conversation. Similarly, new-venture funding is frequently made on the basis of a short pitch, something seemingly designed to make nonnative accent the most prominent feature of the presentation. The studies described here suggest that hiring professionals and new-venture investors will want to become more aware of nonnative-accent bias if they want to hire the best executives or make profitable investment decisions.

### Limitations and Future Research

Finally, there are several limitations to these two studies that must be noted and that suggest future research. First, the generalizability of the sample is potentially limited by the use of student raters in Study 1 and experienced executive MBA students in Study 2. However, Arvey and Campion (1982) found few differences between student and expert judgments. If anything, in Study 1 a student sample would reduce the power of the test, because these evaluators would be less schooled in the management literature emphasizing the importance of political skill to managerial success. Future research should address possible nonnative speaker bias among experienced decision makers, especially the executives, governing boards, and investors who make such decisions.

In addition, these studies do not indicate whether those with nonnative-accented speech actually have less political skill. Being politically skilled involves confidence, an understanding of what others want and value, and how to build networks in particular contexts (Ferris et al., 2005), knowledge that may be more difficult for immigrants to obtain. Here we controlled for everything except candidate accent, but we do not know the extent to which the bias might be based on specific experiences with immigrants who were demonstrably less politically skilled. This is yet another reminder of how little is known about the causes and effects of nonnative accent biases at work.

Finally, future research should more completely explain and understand these processes, perhaps by drawing on the more developed literature on domestic racial bias (Brief et al., 2000), among other sources. These studies are just the beginning of what promises to be a fruitful and important program of research on the workplace experiences of the one billion nonnative speakers of English.

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