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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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at least one of the causes (U.S. Department of Labor, 1995). Because a nonnative accent is the clearest mark of immigrant status we propose that glass-ceiling bias impeding immigrants is manifested in a bias against those speaking with nonnative accents.

Here we seek to build on the developing research on the effects of nonnative accents in psychology and linguistics, combined with research on workplace racial discrimination and political skill, to propose why nonnative accent has a powerful effect on nonnative speakers' opportunities to obtain executive positions in the United States. We theorize that the glass ceiling so many immigrants confront results from nonnative speakers being assessed as having poorer political skill, making them less likely to be offered executive opportunities. Although nonnative accent is a complex signal and different nonnative accents can send differing signals, we propose to begin to understand this bias with a focus on the effects of nonnative accent on assessments of the speakers' political skill. We begin with political skill for several reasons. First, it is widely believed to be important to executive positions and is highly ambiguous, providing a convenient and ostensibly meritocratic justification for biased recommendations, much as has been documented for modern racism (Brief, Dietz, Cohen, Pugh, & Vaslow, 2000; Charles & Nkomo, 2012). Second, if perceptions of political skill do in fact explain the effects of accent on executive and entrepreneurial opportunities, it is a skill candidates can most easily address to expand their opportunities. We test this theory in two experiments: the first in which White and Asian nonnative speakers compete with native speakers from the two races for a middle-management position, and a second in which actual entrepreneurs of varying races and accents compete for funding for their new ventures.

Nonnative Speaker Bias

We propose that discrimination against nonnative speakers for executive positions operates through evaluators' assumptions about a nonnative speaker's political skill. A nonnative accent is one of the strongest signals that the speaker is not native born (Derwing & Munro, 2009) and is an explicit stigmatizing "mark" of foreignness (Goffman, 1963). In the United States, as in many other countries, it is illegal to discriminate against someone at work on the basis of his or her national origin (United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1978); yet, evidence that nonnative speakers face discrimination abounds (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010; Hosoda, Nguyen, & Stone-Romero, 2012).

Linguists note that "having an accent" is an imprecise term. We adopt Giles's (1970) definition of a nonnative accent as the retention of the phonology (including intonation) of the speaker's native language even after the speaker has achieved perfect lexical, grammatical, and syntactical control over the nonnative language. Nonnative accent strength is distinct from language fluency or competence; Cook (1999) and Bent and Bradlow (2003) found that a bias persists against speakers with nonnative accents even when communication clarity is controlled.

Bias that blocks nonnative speakers from executive positions may arise from several sources: typing of jobs (Giele & Stebbins, 2003; Sy et al., 2010), the attribution of certain characteristics to groups that are viewed as incompatible with executive positions (Ridgeway, 2001), and attribution of their success to luck (Lyness & Thompson, 1997). These studies support the charges that nonnative accents lead individuals to be excluded from higher level positions (Holmes, 1992; Solomon, 1990), but those ideas about why nonnative accents have these effects have not been systematically tested.

There have been a handful of empirical studies of the effects of nonnative accent on nonexecutive hiring decisions. Kalin and Rayko (1978) found discrimination against nonnative-accented speakers in Canada when candidates were evaluated for four different jobs. Canadians with native accents were rated more highly for all four job categories than were speakers with Italian, Greek, Portuguese, West African, and Slovakian accents, with these nonnative-accented speakers rated worst for the high-status jobs. De La Zerda and Hopper (1979) had 67 experienced U.S. employment interviewers listen to taped speech samples of Mexican Americans with native and nonnative (Mexican) accents. They found that the interviewers were significantly less likely to hire those with nonnative accents for supervisory positions and that this bias remained even when controlling for exposure to Mexican Americans and self-reported attitudes toward nonnative-accented speech. Interestingly, nonnative accent had no effect on decisions to hire for lower level positions, once experience and attitudes toward Mexican Americans were controlled. Hosoda et al. (2012) found that those with nonnative accents were less likely to be recommended for promotions than were native speakers; they suggested that this is because a nonnative accent signals a lack of fit with the dominant group. We seek to build on this work by drawing on the literature on racial discrimination and political skill to propose that nonnative accents serve as signals that the speaker does not have the political skill necessary for success in an executive position.

Political Skill Assessments and Nonnative Speaker Bias

Political skill is a broad construct. Mintzberg (1983) characterized it as a combination of bases of power and expenditure of energy. Pfeffer (1981) proposed that political skill involved tolerance of ambiguity, advocacy skill, ability to confront and manage conflict, persistence, and the effective use of language. Others consider it the ability to influence others based on social sensitivity, relationship building, working with others, and listening (Huffcutt, Conway, Roth, & Stone, 2001; Klein, DeRouin, & Salas, 2006; Roth, Bobko, McFarland, & Buster, 2008). As Ferris and Treadway (2012) have noted, research on political skill in organizations has progressed "under many monikers (e.g., political behavior, influence tactics, self-presentation, impression management, interpersonal influence)"(p. 7). Porter, Allen, and Angle (1981) proposed that this diversity of conceptualizations of political skill may in part be the result of highly variable norms about the use of different political tactics. The very ambiguity of the concept of political skill makes it an attractive attribution about nonnative speakers, allowing employers to have an ostensibly meritocratic rationale for blocking nonnative speakers from executive positions.

Research on political skill has been substantially facilitated by recent work by Ferris and his colleagues, who have developed a construct and measure of political skill that they and others have validated in numerous settings and used to test a growing theoretical model of the antecedents and consequences of political skill in

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

mild or strongly xenophobic, it may account for the glass-ceiling bias nonnative speakers face. Social identity theory has a long tradition in the study of prejudice (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and has formed the basis for a number of complex theoretical models (see Hogg & Ridgeway, 2003, for a review). There is a large body of research suggesting that people tend to accentuate the negative in evaluating out-group members, preferring members of their own in-group. Thus, it could be that political skill is simply one of the many ways in which people accentuate the positive about their own in-group members. That is, an alternative explanation is that it is not political skill but a more generalized out-group antipathy that accounts for blocked executive opportunities for nonnative speakers. If this is the case, nonnative speakers seeking executive positions or venture funding could address biased attributions about their assumed weak political skill only to find that the out-group antipathy resurfaces in another negative assessment (think "whack a mole" game), and there are no actions they can personally take to overcome general out-group antipathy. We can indirectly test this alternative hypothesis by seeing if nonnative accent signals the antipathy of weak collaborative skill. If general out-group antipathy accounts for the glass-ceiling bias against nonnative speakers, we should see numerous negative attributions. One way to see if it is out-group antipathy generally, rather than political skill particularly, that accounts for fewer executive opportunities for those with nonnative accents is to see if other negative attributions also explain the effects of nonnative accents on hiring and new venture funding. We test for this alternative explanation in both studies.

Study 1: Nonnative Accent and Political Skill in Managerial Hiring

Linguists studying nonnative accent have found it to produce stronger negative biases than does race (Kinzler, Shutts, DeJesus, & Spelke, 2009). Therefore, we expect a glass-ceiling bias for nonnative speakers but not one based on race. We propose this may be because decision makers have become more sensitized to racism than to nonnative accent bias. Racial discrimination, in the guise of less overt and "modern racism" (Brief et al., 2000; McConahay, 1986), continues to have a powerful effect (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000), and Rosette, Leonardelli, and Phillips (2008) found that White remains the leader prototype. However, racism has been more thoroughly and publicly discussed than has nonnative speaker bias. If decision makers are aware of potential racial biases, they may compensate by being careful not to discriminate on the basis of race. Because accent is a more ambiguous signal than race and so provides more opportunities for bias (Charles & Nkomo, 2012), it also makes nonnative accent a more fertile basis for implicit attributions. Building on this work we suggest that accent is independent of and more powerful than race in evaluating candidates for managerial positions.

Finally, because Segrest-Purkiss, Perrewé, Gillespie, Mayes, and Ferris (2006) found an interaction of ethnicity and nonnative accent, such that those with an ethnic name who spoke with a native accent actually were favored over those from the dominant culture with a native accent, we test whether or not native speakers from a minority race received such a boost when applying for executive positions. That is, Study 1 (S1) offers a fully crossed race × accent design allowing us to test the following hypothesis:

> *S1 Hypothesis 1:* Speaking with a nonnative accent will have a negative effect on being recommended for managerial positions.

Although psychologists and linguists have documented several biased assessments of those with nonnative accents (see Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010, for a review), we propose that many of these features will have been effectively screened out when considering candidates for executive positions, making them less important in accounting for the glass-ceiling bias nonnative speakers face. We propose that characteristics such as general competence (Boyd, 2003; Powesland & Giles, 1975) and intelligence (Bradac, 1990) would be assumed in those who have achieved enough to be candidates for executive positions. Rather, due to accent signaling weak political skill and this skill's ambiguity and importance for executive performance, nonnative accent signals lower political skill, and this assessment explains the lower likelihood of the candidate being recommended for an executive position.

> *S1 Hypothesis 2:* The negative effects of speaking with a nonnative accent on recommendations for management positions will be fully mediated by the effects of accent on perceptions of candidate political skill.

Method

Participants and procedure. The participants consisted of 179 undergraduate and graduate students (77 male and 102 female; 124 undergraduate students and 55 graduate students) currently enrolled at a large American university in the Northeast who volunteered for the study. Of the participants, 75 were White, 56 were Asian, 10 were Hispanic, 24 were Black, 2 were Native American, and 12 were unreported. The average age of the participants was 21.8 years ($SD = 5.7$). Ninety-four percent of the students held work-study employment or outside employment, and 74% of the students either had been directly involved with managerial hiring processes or had observed managerial hiring procedures on a regular basis.

At the start of the study, participants were informed that they would be providing assistance to a real organization. The experimenter explained that the business school had a partnership with a company that was interested in gathering feedback on its hiring procedures and explained to participants that their evaluations of managerial job candidates would be compared with evaluations by professional job interviewers. Following the introduction, participants were given a description for a middle-management marketing director (supervising various different marketing groups) and a résumé of the job candidate, which included a photo of the candidate. The name on the résumé was chosen so that the candidate's national origin would be ambiguous. Participants then listened to an audio recording, which played excerpts of a candidate being interviewed for the managerial job.

The interviewer was the same for all interviews: an American male of European ancestry, more than 20 years older than the (all male) job candidates. Participants did not see a photo of the interviewer. The job candidates were a native-born American male of European ancestry (native accent, photo of a White male; NW), a native-born American male of Japanese ancestry (native accent, photo of an Asian male; NA), a Japanese national who had been living in the United States for 5 years and

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 communication 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	*M*	*SD*	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.
** $p < .01$.

Results

S1 Hypothesis 1. The two native-accented candidates were expected to receive more favorable recommendations for the managerial position than were the two nonnative-accented candidates. An analysis of variance with *t* tests of differences between each of the conditions was run, revealing a significant effect of accent on hiring recommendations, $F(1, 175) = 19.64$, $p < .01$. Candidates with a native accent ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.03$) were rated as more likely to be hired than those with a nonnative accent ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.20$), $t(177) = 4.47$, $p = .01$. There was no effect of race on hiring recommendations, $F(1, 175) = 1.23$, *ns*; further, there was no interaction between race and accent, $F(1, 175) = 1.71$, *ns*, contrary to Segrest-Purkiss et al.'s (2006) finding of an interaction of ethnicity and accent. Therefore, native-accented candidates of both races were significantly more likely to be recommended for the middle-management position than were nonnative-accented candidates, regardless of race, fully supporting the effects of political skill, but not race, and fully supporting S1 Hypothesis 1.

S1 Hypothesis 2. It was expected that native-accented candidates would be perceived as having more political skill than the nonnative-accented candidates and that these attributions would fully mediate the less favorable recommendations that nonnative speakers face. We included two alternative explanations, communication and collaborative skill, as well as the hypothesized political skill, in the same mediation model simultaneously to test which ones best explain the hiring recommendation. We assessed political skill as fully mediating the model using the bootstrap procedure developed by Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008). This approach enabled us to estimate the indirect effects of political skill while simultaneously testing collaborative skill and communication skill as alternative mediators.

With 5,000 bootstrap resamples, the indirect effects were significant for political skill alone (indirect effect = .57, $SE = .13$, $z = 4.45$). The resulting 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for the indirect effect ranged from .13 to .53, as presented in Table 2; given that the range is positive and the lower bound does not include zero, S1 Hypothesis 2 was supported. As shown in Table 2, attributions of collaborative skill and communication skill did not mediate the effects of nonnative accent on hiring recommendations. Further, political skill alone fully mediated the relationship when the raters' race and gender were entered as covariates (indirect effect = .53; 95% CI = .18, .42). Thus, the relationship also holds when race and gender are controlled; this finding strengthens support for political skill assessments, which independently of communication and collaborative skill assessments explain the bias against hiring a candidate with a nonnative accent for a middle-management position, in support of S1 Hypothesis 2. No support was found for the alternative explanations.

Study 1 Discussion

In Study 1, possession of a native accent explained the decision of raters to recommend candidates for a middle-management position. This accent bias operated through perceptions that nonnative speakers have weaker political skill, with the alternatives of race, communication skill, and collaborative skill failing to explain the effects of accent on hiring recommendation. Interestingly, communication skill has been featured most prominently in explanations for bias against nonnative speakers, but here we found that communication skill did not account for nonnative accent's effects on executive opportunities. This may be because communication skill is more easily mastered than political skill (Pfeffer, 1981), and so candidates for executive positions are more likely to have sufficient communication skill for an executive position. This explanation is consistent with our theorizing that the ambiguity and importance of political skill make it an attractive, ostensibly meritocratic reason to block nonnative speakers from executive positions. Political skill is more ambiguous than communication skill, and so nonnative speakers appear to be more likely to receive lower assessments (see Charles & Nkomo, 2012, for a discussion).

We found that nonnative-accented speakers, identical in every respect to native speakers save their accents, are less likely to be offered executive positions. This bias cannot be attributed to race, communication skill, or collaborative skill. Accent-driven assessments of weaker candidate political skill explain the effects of nonnative accent on executive hiring recommendations.

Study 2: Nonnative Accent and Political Skill in Entrepreneurial Funding

The findings from Study 1 support glass-ceiling biases working through political skill but not through racism, communication skill, or collaborative skill attributions. However, hiring for middle-manager positions in large organizations is not the only route to executive responsibilities. Immigrants have increasingly pursued entrepreneurial opportunities to circumvent suspected or experienced biases in larger organizations (e.g. Kloosterman & Rath, 2001; Rath & Kloosterman, 2000). These individuals choose to start new ventures as an adaptive mechanism because they believe their aspirations to elite positions often are blocked in the United States or any country that is not their birth country (Kim, Hurh, & Fernandez, 1989).

Table 2
Study 1 Tests of Indirect Effects

Mediation effect	*z*	*SE*	Indirect effect	95% CI	
				Lower bound	Upper bound
Accent → political skill → recommend hire (H2)	4.45***	.13	.57	.13	.53
Accent → communication skill → recommend hire	1.94	.09	.17	−.01	.22
Accent → collaborative skill → recommend hire	1.54	.09	.15	−.01	.10

Note. *SE* = standard error; CI = confidence interval; H2 = Study 1 Hypothesis 2.
***$p < .001$.

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

link for each video that they were coding, which directed them to a video that they watched online. After watching a video, they immediately filled in their ratings on a short questionnaire. Between each video, raters received a link that directed them to watch a 30-s "commercial," or a video composed of neutral material, to limit contamination. These commercials were pretested to ensure that they were neutral and did not affect questionnaire responses. Because each question was asked about an entrepreneur of two independent coders, interrater reliability coefficients are reported. Means, standard deviations, and correlations among these variables are reported in Table 3. The entire exercise took about 30 minutes to complete and concluded with a few personal demographic questions.

Measures.

Funding decision. The dependent variable, funding decision, was based on whether or not the entrepreneur received funding in his or her pitch competition. These assessments were made by experienced early-stage venture funders, who were judges in the pitch competition. Funding decision was coded as 0 (*did not received funding*) or 1 (*did receive funding*).

Nonnative accent. Nonnative accent was coded based on the extent to which the entrepreneur in the video pitch appeared to have a nonnative accent. The question was "To what extent do you believe the entrepreneur has a nonstandard (American) English accent?" A score of 1 indicated that the entrepreneur did not have any nonnative accent, and a score of 5 indicating that the entrepreneur had a nonnative accent to a great extent. The interrater reliability coefficient was .73.

Political skill. Political skill was assessed by coders in response to the question, "To what extent do you believe the entrepreneur has strong interpersonal influence skill?" A score of 1 indicated that the entrepreneur appeared to have no political skill, and a score of 5 indicated that the entrepreneur appeared to have very strong political skill. Although this single question necessarily is a partial representation of Ferris et al.'s (2005) political skill, it nevertheless had an interrater reliability coefficient of .73.

Communication skill. For communication skill, coders were asked, "To what extent do you believe the entrepreneur to be an effective communicator?" Scores ranged from 1 (*not at all effective*) to 5 (*seemed effective to a great extent*). Interrater reliability was .82.

Collaborative skill. For collaborative skill, coders were asked, "To what extent do you believe the entrepreneur to be effective in collaborating with others?" Scores ranged from 1 (*not at all effective*) to 5 (*seemed effective to a great extent*). Interrater reliability was .80.

Controls. The demographic control variables of age, gender, and race of the entrepreneurs were obtained from the pitch competitions' records. Physical attractiveness was measured by the coders' responses to the question, "To what extent do you believe the entrepreneur is physically attractive?" Responses ranged from 1 (*not at all attractive*) to 5 (*attractive to a great extent*). Interrater reliability was .76.

Results

S2 Hypothesis 1. Entrepreneurs with nonnative accents were expected to be less likely to receive investment funding than the native-accented entrepreneurs, with a stronger accent effect on receiving funding than the entrepreneur's race. Hierarchical binary logistic regression was used to analyze the effect of accent on funding, with age, gender, and attractiveness entered as the first step as controls and race and nonnative accent entered as the second step. As shown in Table 4, S2 Hypothesis 1 was fully supported. Entrepreneurs' race was not significant, but entrepreneurs with a nonnative accent were significantly less likely to receive new-venture funding, Model $\chi^2(5) = 24.56$, $p < .01$.

S2 Hypothesis 2. First, nonnative-accented entrepreneurs were judged as having significantly less political skill than native-accented entrepreneurs, even when controlling for their communication skill and collaborative skill. This judgment enabled a test of the mediating role of political skill (see Table 5).

In the test of the hypothesis that perceived political skill mediates the relationship between accent and entrepreneurial funding, hierarchical logistic regression was once again employed. Model 3 (see Table 6) shows that the relationship between nonnative accent and funding is significant. In Model 4, when political skill, collaborative skill, and communication skill are added, the relationship between accent and funding is no longer significant, and political skill is the only significant variable in this simultaneous test. Using Preacher and Hayes's (2008) SPSS macro as a robustness check and resampling 5,000 times for the bootstrap estimates, we also found that political skill mediated the effect of nonnative accent on entrepreneurial funding (point estimate for specific indirect effect = −.24; 95% CI = −.13, −.41). As in Study 1, there was no evidence of statistically significant collaborative skill (in-

Table 3
Study 2 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Funding decision[a]	0.33	0.47	—							
2. Age	37.40	6.26	−.13	—						
3. Gender[b]	0.86	0.35	.16	.24*	—					
4. Race[c]	0.33	0.47	−.05	−.19*	.02	—				
5. Nonnative accent	2.82	1.56	−.21**	.02	−.19*	.05	—			
6. Interpersonal influence	2.90	1.11	.72**	−.04	.11	−.09	−.32**	—		
7. Communication skill	3.24	0.93	−.01	−.05	.05	−.05	−.04	.01	—	
8. Collaborative skill	3.01	0.91	.07	−.12	−.03	−.28**	−.02	−.04	.34**	—
9. Attractiveness	2.60	0.98	.27**	−.07	−.06	−.09	.01	.44**	.07	.02

Note. $N = 90$.
[a] For funding decision, 0 = no, 1 = yes. [b] For gender, 0 = female, 1 = male. [c] For race, 0 = White, 1 = Asian/Hispanic/Black.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

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

	Entrepreneurial funding (received funding vs. did not receive funding)[a]					
	Model 1			Model 2		
Predictor	β	exp(β)[b]	*SE*[c]	β	exp(β)[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 χ^2		18.05			24.56**	
df for overall χ^2		3			5	
pseudo R^2		.09			.17	
Δpseudo R^2					.08	

Note. $N = 90$. *SE* = standard error; *df* = degrees of freedom.
[a] $n = 30$ in the received funding condition and $n = 60$ in the did not receive funding condition; received funding = 1; did not receive funding = 0. [b] exp (β) is the odds ratio. [c] Standard error values for β.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

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 β = −.30; $p < .01$, with this measure of funding; with political skill added, nonnative accent β = .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.

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**
F	1.58	6.15**	8.22**
R^2	.05	.31	.41
ΔR^2		.26**	.10**
Adjusted R^2	.02	.26	.36

Note. $N = 90$.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

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 6
Study 2 Hierarchical Logistic Regression Analysis of Mediation of Political Skill on Relationship Between Nonnative Accent and Entrepreneurial Funding

	Entrepreneurial funding (received funding vs. did not receive funding)[a]											
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
Predictor	β	exp(β)[b]	*SE*[c]	β	exp(β)[b]	*SE*[c]	β	exp(β)[b]	*SE*[c]	β	exp(β)[b]	*SE*[c]
Constant	−3.42	0.03	1.14	−8.21**	0.01	3.34	−2.48*	0.08	1.19	−8.40**	0.01	3.65
Step 1: Controls												
Age	−0.15	0.86	0.24	−1.80	0.84	0.54	−0.14	0.87	0.24	−0.17	0.84	0.54
Gender	0.98*	2.68	0.47	0.28	1.33	1.01	0.78	2.18	0.48	0.32	1.38	1.06
Race	−0.04	0.96	0.15	0.11	1.12	0.35	−0.02	0.99	0.15	0.11	1.12	0.35
Attractiveness	0.64**	1.89	0.18	−0.48	0.62	0.44	0.65**	1.92	0.18	−0.48	0.62	0.44
Step 2												
Communication skill				0.06	1.07	0.39				0.07	1.08	0.40
Collaborative skill				0.47	1.61	0.47				0.47	1.60	0.47
Political skill				2.75**	15.59	0.57				2.76**	15.85	0.58
Nonnative accent							−0.27**	0.77	0.11	0.03	1.03	0.23
−2 log likelihood		227.03			55.41			220.60			55.40	
Overall χ^2		18.13**			69.18***			24.56***			69.19**	
df for overall χ^2		4			7			5			8	
pseudo R^2		.13			.52***			.17*			.54***	

Note. $N = 90$. *SE* = standard error; *df* = degrees of freedom.
[a] $N = 30$ in the received funding condition and $N = 60$ in the did not receive funding condition. [b] exp(β) is the odds ratio. [c] Standard error values for β.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

new venture funding as having less political skill, which in turn fully mediated the effects of accent on hiring and funding recommendations. None of the alternative explanations that nonnative accent bias could be explained by race, attributions of communication skill, or general out-group antipathy as reflected in attributions of collaboration skill were supported. Study 1 was an experiment to test executive hiring recommendations controlling for what was spoken, and Study 2 was a field experiment using actual entrepreneurs vying for funding in top-ranked U.S. pitch competitions. In both studies, speakers of native (American) English received significantly higher recommendations for either managerial positions or entrepreneurial funding than did the speakers whose nonnative accents signaled their foreign birth. Nonnative accent, not race, best explained executive hiring recommendations and new venture funding. Although those with nonnative accents were judged as having weaker communication skill, this did not result in fewer hiring and funding recommendations, and nonnative accent had no effects on attributions of the speakers' collaborative skill. The implications of these results for our evolving theories of glass-ceiling effects and of political skill are discussed in the next section. A discussion of the practical implications of these studies and conclusions with limitations of the research and suggestions for further research conclude the paper.

Theoretical Implications

These studies have important implications for our understanding of glass-ceiling bias and discrimination more generally, as well as the developing theory of political skill. First, unlike Segrest-Purkiss et al. (2006), who found an interaction effect for ethnicity and accent, we did not find that Asian candidates or entrepreneurs speaking with native accents gained any advantage over native-accented Whites. Study 1 differed from theirs in its focus on executive positions and the use of race rather than ethnicity, suggesting future research is needed to better understand why our results differ. Second, although linguists report that people speaking with nonnative accents are more difficult to understand (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010), we found that communication skill did not account for glass-ceiling bias against nonnative speakers. We speculate that one reason for this is that previous research focused on lower level employees, whereas we studied access to executive positions. Candidates for executive positions have established a track record of achievement, and so listeners may assume they have sufficient communication skill to do the work. As we have proposed, communication skill is less ambiguous than political skill and so may not be the best ostensibly meritocratic attribution to justify glass-ceiling bias. Similarly, Hosoda and Stone-Romero (2010) speculated that the bias against nonnative speakers they found was caused by accent signaling out-group membership and so prompted out-group antipathy. However, we found no evidence of generalized out-group antipathy. Our studies join other recent work (e.g., Pearce & Xu, 2012) seeking to unpack out-group antipathy to develop more nuanced understandings of the particular attributes and specific contexts that out-group membership can signal. These results are consistent with our theorizing that the combined importance and ambiguity of political skill make it an attractive, ostensibly meritocratic reason to block nonnative speakers from executive opportunities. Finally, we found that attributions of weaker political skill were the best explanation of glass-ceiling bias, but this should not imply that it is the only explanation. Nonnative accent is a complex signal, and we hope future research can further elaborate on the reasons for its effects.

These studies demonstrate that perceptions of political skill appear to be a powerful, unacknowledged, factor in glass-ceiling effects more generally. Political skill is an important executive

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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