ALL OTHER THINGS BEING EQUAL:
MICHIGAN PRINCIPALS' HIRING PREFERENCES
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Abstract

More than 500,000 teachers are hired each year, predominantly by school principals who rely heavily on interviews and look beyond teacher candidates' job-specific characteristics to determine the candidates' likely effectiveness as well as their fit within the organization. A need exists to better understand school leaders' biases and tendencies when hiring teachers. In this study, 308 Michigan public school principals answered 10 hypothetical, but realistic questions about teacher candidate characteristics. The principals preferred candidates who were willing to coach sports, possessed a high grade point average, and came from a teaching family. Principals were least likely to hire candidates who had to repeat courses, had visible tattoos, or were obese. The principals in this study displayed significant biases toward and against certain teacher candidate characteristics, regardless of whether the characteristic related to the duties of a teacher.

INTRODUCTION

> **Craig Patrick:** *This is the final roster? You're kidding me, right? This is our first day, Herb. We've got a week of this. What about the advisory staff? Aren't they supposed to have a say in this?*
> **Herb Brooks:** *Not technically.*
> **Craig Patrick:** *You're missing some of the best players.*
> **Herb Brooks:** *I'm not looking for the best players, Craig. I'm looking for the right ones.*
> (from the movie *Miracle*, 2004)

Beyond socioeconomic status, teacher effectiveness is the most important variable in student achievement (Aaronson, Barrow, & Sander, 2007; Hattie, 2009; Hanushek, Kain, O'Brein, & Rivkin, 2005; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2008; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004). Because good teachers increase student learning, it is imperative that school administrators hire the best teachers available. How to identify the best teachers from a pool of candidates is not easy, however. Furthermore, it might not be sufficient for schools to simply hire the best teacher applicants. Rather, schools often do, and perhaps should, choose the "right" applicant.

Arguably, the right applicant is the teacher who is going to be highly effective and is willing to remain at that school – a good fit. Since teacher effectiveness among new teachers is lowest during the first few years (Aaronson, et al., 2007; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor 2006; Harris & Sass, 2011; Jepsen, 2005; Rivkin, et al., 2005; Rockoff, 2004), schools benefit greatly when new hires remain at that school beyond the steep learning curve of the first few years. Unfortunately, teacher turnover is a major problem in our schools today, with more than 30% of new teachers leaving the profession within their first five years, amounting to nearly a half million teachers leaving their positions each year (Haynes, 2014; Ingersoll, 2001). Attrition costs amount to $2.2 billion each year, which is particularly impactful on high-poverty schools where teacher turnover is 50% more common, compounding the difficultly low-income schools already face in trying to attract qualified teacher applicants (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Haynes, 2014).

School leaders face the challenge of selecting the right applicants for their open teaching positions. A multifaceted set of criteria factor into determining which candidate should be offered the job. Attributes that can be ascertained directly from the application materials include the teacher candidate's degree and certification, educational achievement, and related experience (Cranston, 2012a; Harrs & Sass, 2009). Further job-specific characteristics can be inferred from additional application materials such as letters of recommendation and evaluations from student teaching or previous teaching positions, as well as from the interview, and in rare cases, from a teaching demonstration. Job-specific characteristics center on applicants' ability to teach effectively, including such skills as differentiation, scaffolding, assessment, and classroom management (Woodburn, 2012). In addition, general professional characteristics such as knowledge and verbal and quantitative skills have been linked to student achievement and are valued highly in the hiring process (Rice, 2003; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). Finally, another layer of criteria most certainly factor into the hiring process – general personality characteristics and non-job specific skills, such as: enthusiasm, worth ethic, flexibility, caring, and interpersonal

skills, which have also been found to contribute to teacher effectiveness (Ingle & Rutledge, 2010).

The type and range of teacher candidate characteristics that school leaders assess in their attempt to predict future teaching effectiveness is vast and complex, and embedded in the hiring process are the biases and tendencies of those doing the hiring – typically school principals. Researchers admit that they know surprisingly little about practices school leaders use to evaluate and hire teachers and even less about the tacit criteria school leaders use to screen teacher candidates (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005; Cranston, 2012a; DeArmond & Goldhaber, 2005; Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 2006; Walsh & Tracy, 2004). Certainly, school leaders do not always hire teachers based on objective criteria. Everyone is guilty of biased behavior in some form, which inevitably finds its way into the hiring process. Hirers look beyond candidates' job-specific characteristics to make assumptions both about the candidates' likely effectiveness as well as their fit within the organization (Bodenman, 1995; Freemont-Smith, 1984; Little & Miller, 2007). School leaders often screen out candidates who they think will not fit with their schools' norms and culture, and they prioritize candidates who fit their schools' value system (Fremont-Smith, 1984; Little & Miller, 2007; Rutledge, 2008).

A need exists to better understand what school leaders look for when hiring teachers, particularly the nonobvious characteristics. Candidates seek to know more about how they should present themselves. Likewise, teacher educators want to know about the advice they should be giving to teacher candidates about the job search process. In this study, we compiled 10 hypothetical, but realistic, teacher candidate characteristics from our own experiences and ruminations as well as those from the existing literature on hiring biases in other fields. We sent the brief survey via email to all 3,200 public school principals in Michigan and received 308 responses, which are presented in the findings.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Although based on a mere 10-question survey, this study could be examined from several perspectives. We chose two lenses with which to view our research. First, we situated the study in the theory of person-organization fit (POF), which broadly involves the compatibility between employees and the organizations in which they work (Kristoff, 1996). The theory of POF explains why employees' and organizations' values, beliefs, and personalities commonly match (Little, & Miller, 2007). POF is based on Schneider's (1987) attraction-selection-attrition theory, which suggests that organizations select employees who are similar to their existing employees, and employees are attracted to organizations whose characteristics are similar to their own. Consequently, organizations tend to exhibit employee homogeneity (Kristoff, 1996). Teachers whose ideas, values, and images fit with a school and community transition into their roles smoothly and are more likely to stay (Schneider, 1987).

Schools are similar to other organizations, with administrators displaying predictable hiring behaviors. We know that principals' hiring preferences are based more on subjective criteria than by objective measures (Cranston, 2012a, 2012b; Ingle, Rutledge, & Bishop, 2011; Rutledge, et al., 2010). Principals look beyond specific teaching competencies and general professional skills to make determinations related to the cultural characteristics of their schools and the extent to which a candidate will fit. Teacher candidates must fit with the community generally, as well as with the staff with whom they will be working daily (Cranston, 2012a,

2012b; Ingle, et al., 2011). Idiosyncratic fit trumps general fit, however, particularly in rural areas (Little & Miller, 2007). In addition, Jacob and Lefgren (2005) have suggested that teacher fit extends beyond personal compatibility, with the quality of the teacher-administrator relationship serving as a predictor of student test score growth.

Secondly, we approached this study from bias theory, which stems from social cognition theory. Biases are unfair prejudices against or for a person or group, typically due to stereotyping. Stereotyping is generalization about a group of people, though not necessarily incorrect or illogical (McCauley, Stitt, & Segal, 1980). Whereas biases and prejudices are associated with thoughts or inclinations, discrimination refers to the "unjustified difference in treatment on the basis of any physical, or cultural trait such as sex, ethnic origin, religion, or political opinion" (Romei & Ruggieri, 2013, p. 1). In many cases, discrimination is illegal.

Indirect discrimination, or disparate treatment, is common in hiring practices (Lee, 2005; Romei & Ruggieri, 2013). Though often not explicitly, employers often treat some applicants less favorably due to their physical or personal characteristics. The antithesis of discrimination, favoritism, which includes cronyism and nepotism, is also common in hiring practices. Favoritism refers to giving certain applicants unjustified preference for non-merited reasons. With both discrimination and favoritism, hirers make judgments about applicants' future work performance based on extraneous characteristics not specified in the job description. Discriminating or favoring teacher hiring decisions stem from stereotyping and pattern recognition, which are not always wrong or illegal. As such, the issue is complex and needs further study.

Teacher Hiring

The teacher hiring process is arguably the most important component of school improvement, particularly since evidence points to the link between teacher quality and student achievement (Stronge, 2010; Rivkin, et al., 2005; Sanders & Horn, 1998; Walsh & Tracy, 2004). Despite critiques about the teacher hiring process (DeArmond & Golhaber, 2005; Liu & Johnson, 2006), the topic has not been researched thoroughly, especially compared to other topics in educational leadership (Boyd, et al., 2007; Cranston, 2012a; DeArmond & Goldhaber, 2005; Guarino, et al., 2006; Rutledge, et al., 2008).

Overwhelmingly, the teacher hiring process is led by building-level principals, who rely primarily on interviews to make their hiring decisions (Rutledge et al., 2008; Strauss, Bowes, Marks, & Plesko, 2000). The first step of the hiring process usually consists of screening, during which teachers candidates' credentials such as certifications and areas of highly-qualified status are examined, and those who do not match the requirements are eliminated. The second step typically consists of a review of the qualified applicants in order to determine whom to interview (Rutledge et al., 2008). It is at the interview stage where principals, sometimes in concert with a small team of teachers, seek to make determinations about whether the candidate will be an effective teacher, as well as whether the candidate will be a good fit for the school. Both the principal and the potential teacher use the interview to exchange information and make judgments (Cranston, 2012a, 2012b; Macan & Merritt, 2011).

Despite widespread research that structured interviews are far more valid than unstructured interviews (McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt, & Maurer; 1994; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998), interviews in any form are rather ineffective at predicting future job performance (Huffcutt, 2011; Mason & Schroder, 2010). Accordingly, the purpose of the interview extends

beyond an attempt to determine a candidate's teaching skills. After all, if school leaders were sincerely concerned with finding the best teachers, they would borrow from hiring practices in other fields by having candidates teach lessons. Certainly, summer hiring is prohibitive to teaching demonstrations; however, schools have had success by inviting in employees' children during the summer interview process for candidates to teach mini-lessons while the selection team observes. Nonetheless, the interview dominates the teacher hiring process in large part because principals are ultimately looking for candidates with desired characteristics – often those that match the characteristics of their existing teachers (Braun, Willems, Brown, & Green, 1987; Rutledge et al., 2008; Theel & Tallerico, 2004).

Teacher Candidate Attributes

Candidates for teaching positions reveal to the hiring team a host of attributes in their written application materials, some of which are required, like certification and GPA, and some of which are voluntary, like family history and willingness to coach. Additionally, candidates reveal further attributes during their interviews, both nonverbally and through how they choose to respond to questions. Certainly, how a candidate looks is difficult to conceal during the interview. Conversely, characteristics such as one's sexuality and beliefs are often able to be concealed. What follows is a brief review of literature on discrimination related to the 10 attributes on which we surveyed principals.

Family Teaching Legacy

The role of family and social connections in getting hired has been largely situated in research on nepotism or cronyism (Ponzo & Scoppa, 2011). The insinuation of nepotism in schools, as in other fields, brings about negative responses and questions about lack of ethics (Ruder, 2010). Nepotism is generally associated with giving preferential hiring to family members of existing employees (Padgett, Padgett, & Morris, 2014). Determining preferential treatment, however, is not easy. For example, Ruder (2010) documented numerous cases of school systems with multiple family members employed, yet he acknowledged that it is difficult to determine if the employees were hired based on merit or connections. Moreover, it would be nearly impossible to operate many small school districts if relatives were unable to work together.

The prevailing perspective on nepotism is that it is a negative influence on organizations and results in less-qualified people getting hired (Bellow, 2003; Padgett et al., 2014). Employees who do not benefit from nepotism report lower trust, motivation, and job satisfaction (Padgett et al., 2014). Not all researchers on the subject portray nepotism as negative, however. Bellow (2003), for example, suggested that employees differentiate between bad and good nepotism. Good nepotism can result in greater organizational loyalty and sense of community (Dickson, 2012; Pfeffer, 2006). It would be incorrect to associate our question nepotism in this study, in its common construct, since we only inquired about a teacher candidate who came from a long line of teachers. Arguably, a principal might consider such a candidate to have a deeper understanding of the profession, perhaps making him or her more qualified than a candidate who did not come from a family legacy of teaching.

Grades/Coursework

The relationship between teachers' cognitive abilities and their teaching effectiveness has been studied extensively with mixed results (Harris & Rutledge, 2007). Some have espoused a relationship between secondary teachers' content knowledge and student learning, particularly in math (Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000), but for elementary teachers, the correlation is questionable (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Others have suggested that teachers' grades are not a good indicator of teaching effectiveness (Peterson, 2002; Kahl, 1980) and that GPA is a consideration when it is low, but having a very high GPA is not necessarily better (Bolz, 2009).

Similarly, it is not clear how much a teacher candidate's academic achievement and cognitive abilities factor into hiring decisions. Some have asserted that principals are averse to hiring teachers with high intelligence for fear that they might leave the profession or that highly intelligent teacher candidates might appear dull and lacking in the charisma needed to motivate students (Harris et al., 2010; Wise, 1987). In some studies (Ballou, 1996; Supon & Ryland, 2010), GPA was positively correlated with the likelihood of obtaining a teaching position; whereas, other studies show GPA to be among the least important factors (Cranston, 2012a; Harris et al., 2010).

Despite the ambiguity over the degree to which teacher candidates' GPA increases their likelihood of getting hired, it appears that school principals place high value on a base level of content knowledge. Principals want teachers who meet a minimum threshold for intelligence, but that threshold can be ascertained from the candidate's degree and certification (Harris et al., 2010). Accordingly, principals might view candidates who had to repeat courses as not meeting the minimal threshold in spite of having earned their degrees.

Willingness and ability to coach

With nearly eight million participants in high school athletics across the United States, filling the 400,000 corresponding coaching positions is no small feat (National Federation, 2014). High school athletics binds many small communities across the US. Schools are often judged by the success of their athletic teams (Frank, 2003), and teacher-coaches are known and respected more for their coaching performance than for their teaching (Brown, 2012).

We were unable to locate any data on the percentage of high school coaches who are also teachers, but studies suggest schools prefer coaches who are also teachers (Curtner-Smith, 2001; Wilson, Bloom, & Harvey, 2010). While it is common for teacher candidates to enter the profession with a stronger desire to coach than to teach, the reverse is also true, particularly in poor schools where new teachers are expected to coach even if they do not express a desire to do so (Brown, 2012). This issue has garnered little research; however, Ingle, Rutledge, and Bishop (2011) found that all six secondary principals in their study valued applicants' willingness to take on extra-curricular duties such as coaching; whereas, only two of the 15 (13%) of elementary principals expressed a similar preference.

Tattoos

Appearance is a major factor in the teacher hiring process. In a study on the hiring practices of 60 teachers, candidate appearance was mentioned as important more often than other characteristics, such as love of children and pedagogical knowledge (Mason & Schroeder, 2010). Furthermore, poor appearance was the most commonly cited negative characteristic of a teacher candidate. While some argue that teachers can use self-disclosure to improve students' affective learning (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2009), tattoos, despite their growing popularity, are still largely perceived negatively. Since 38% of Americans under 30 have tattoos (Pew, 2010), teacher candidates would benefit from knowing how principals view tattoos.

Researchers tend to study the social consequences of tattooing, as a form of visible body modification, using Symbolic Interaction Theory (Aksan, Kisac, Aydin, & Demirbuen; Doss & Ebesu Hubbard, 2009). Symbolic Interaction Theory asserts that social meanings and judgments stem as much from symbols as they do from actions. Accordingly, people draw conclusions about people based on their tattoos (Timming, 2014).

Tattoos are a form of permanent body modification that can convey several messages ranging from aesthetics to a sign of commitment or reclamation (Kang & Jones, 2014; Swanger, 2006). Although the prevalence of tattoos is rising and has become mainstream (Wohlrab, Stahl, & Kappeler, 2007), visual body modification stereotypes tend to convey to employers that a candidate is nonconformist, less educated, and lacking in responsibility (Kang & Jones, 2014; Martin & Dula, 2010; Ruetzler, Taylor, Reynolds, Bake, & Killen, 2012). Women with tattoos seem to receive more unsubstantiated negative perceptions than men (Rosenhoeft, et al., 2008), a concern in the teaching profession where more than 75% are female. Overall, having tattoos seems to be a negative in the job search process (Resenhoeft, Villa, & Wiseman, 2008; Ruetzler et al., 2012; Swanger, 2006).

Obesity

Consistently, research has shown that being obese is a major detriment to getting hired. When employers are aware of an applicant's obesity, they are less likely to recommend the candidate for hire, even when all other factors were the same as those of normal weight applicants (Agerström & Rooth, 2011; Grant & Mizzi, 2014; Macan & Merritt, 2011; Roehling, 1999). Obese people regularly face direct discrimination, particularly since many people find it acceptable to make comments about a person's weight (Puhl & Heuer, 2011). Unlike other discriminated groups, there are no laws prohibiting weigh discrimination in the workplace. What is more, employers' indirect discrimination against obese applicants far exceeds what they confess (Agerström & Rooth, 2011). Comprising more than 35% of the population, obese Americans are the largest stigmatized group in modern society (CDC, 2014). Although both obese men and obese women are discriminated against in hiring, the problem is much worse for women with estimates that obese women are 10 to 16 times more likely than men to face discrimination (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2005; Griffin, 2007; Roehling, Roehling, & Pichler, 2007). Since women make up more than 75% of teachers, this phenomenon is of particular importance to teacher hiring.

An additional concern for obese teacher candidates stems from the fact that unlike other forms of discrimination, obesity stigmatization increases with education level (Carr & Friedman,

2005). College-educated people are more likely to perceive obese people as lazy and undisciplined (Ogden & Clementi, 2010; Puhl & Heuer, 2011). Whereas discrimination based on race or gender is unacceptable among most college-educated people, many justify their negativity about and bias against obese people (Bartels, Nordstrom, & Pratt, 2013). Although several studies have shown that obese college students face multiple forms of discrimination, including discrimination in the job market, obesity discrimination and the hiring process has been researched much less than other forms of discrimination, such as race and gender (Agerstrom & Rooth, 2011; Macan & Merritt, 2011). Our review of the literature revealed no studies on obesity and teaching.

Church Activity

Although the Establishment Clause prevents schools from promoting religion, debates abound over the presence of Christian symbols in public schools. The Alabama legislature recently passed a bill allowing the display of the Ten Commandments in public places, including schools, where many currently are hung (Kachmar, 2014). From the alignment of school calendars with Christian holidays to the fact that 78% of Americans are Christian, it is hard to deny the role of Christian privilege in America's public schools (Blumenfeld, 2007; Bon, 2009).

Across US universities, education majors are the most religious students on campus and tend to become more religious over time (Kimball, Mitchell, Thorton, & Young-Demarco, 2009). Likewise, teachers are more religious than the general US population (Slater, 2008). Despite the prominent role of religion in Americans' lives, secularization theory suggests that religion is becoming more private and less a part of social consciousness and institutions, such as schools (Wallace, Wright, & Hyde, 2014). Religious discrimination, or preference, in the hiring process has not been studied nearly as much as other types of workplace discrimination, and our review uncovered no scholarly works on religious discrimination in the hiring of teachers.

In two studies involving fictitious resumes with seven different religions and a control group, researchers found employer discrimination against religious applicants compared to applicants whose resumes contained no religious identification (Wright, Wallace, Bailey, & Hyde, 2013; Wallace et al., 2014). Discrimination against religious candidates was stronger in the South compared to the Northeast for all religions (including atheists), except for Jews who faced no hiring discrimination and in some cases, preferential treatment. From these two studies, one could conclude that applicants would be wise to leave religious information off their resumes and absent from the interview.

Islam

As described above, it appears that revealing one's religious affiliation is detrimental to getting a job, generally. For Muslims, however, the bias is much greater. In the Wright et al. (2013) and Wallace et al. (2014) studies, Muslims were the least likely to receive a phone call or email reply to the resumes, which confirms previous research (Ghuman & Jackson, 2008; Park, Felix, & Lee, 2007). Scholars have noted that since overt discrimination against any group is unacceptable in modern society, anti-Muslim bias tends to be subtle (Cashin, 2010; Park, Malachi, Sternin, & Tevet, 2009).

The religious affiliation of moderate Muslims, like those of other religious groups, is relatively undetectable unless the candidate reveals their affiliation (Cashin, 2010). For Muslims who follow traditional protocols, however, their affiliation is obvious, rendering them more open to discrimination. Muslims who wear traditional attire face greater discrimination (Ghumman & Jackson, 2010; King & Ahmad, 2010) in the hiring process; and, Muslim women who wear headscarves, known as hijab, experience greater workplace discrimination and stigmatization (Reeves, McKinney, & Azam, 2012).

Atheism

Arguably, atheists are the most reviled minority group in the United States today (Coragun, Kosmin, Keysar, Hammer, & Nielsen, 2012; Edgell, Gerteis, & Hartmann, 2006). A 2012 Gallop poll found that people would be least likely to vote for a hypothetical atheist candidate, with 43% stating that they would not vote for an otherwise qualified candidate if s/he were an atheist, compared with 40% who would not vote for a Muslim and 30% who would not vote for a gay or lesbian candidate. Half of Americans would disprove of their child marrying an atheist (Edgell et al., 2006; Pew, 2014a), and more than 60% of Americans believe that atheists negatively influence society (Bramlett, 2012). The Boy Scouts of America dropped its ban on homosexuals in May 2013, yet agnostics and atheists (A/A) are still not allowed to participate as Scouts or Scout Leaders (www.scouting.org). What is more, there are still laws in several US states barring atheists from holding public office (Cimino & Smith, 2007), and courts have a consistent record of denying custody to A/A parents expressly because of their lack of religious belief (Cline, 2006).

As a marginalized group, 40% of atheists have reported that they face discrimination in the form of slander, coercion, and social ostracism (Cragun et al., 2012; Hammer, Cragun, Hwang, & Smith, 2012). Furthermore, the frequency and severity of discrimination correlates with the extent to which the atheist was "out" or public about her atheism (Hammer et al., 2012). We were unable to locate any literature on atheists and job seeking, with the exception of the Wright et al. (2013) and Wallace et al. (2014) studies where atheists were second to Muslims in the amount of prejudice faced in the job hunt process.

Homosexuality

Gay rights have come a long way over the past decade and a half. In 2001, 35% of Americans favored gay marriage; whereas in 2014, 54% support gay marriage (PEW, 2014a). Gay marriage is significantly more supported by Millennials (68%) than Baby Boomers (48%), and by Democrats (67%) compared to Republicans (32%). In the workplace, homosexuals earn less money (Badgett, Lau, Sears, & Ho, 2007) when controlling for other variables and they experience more discrimination (Colvin, 2009). Bailey, Wallace, and Wright (2013) noted, however, that studying discrimination against gays in the workplace is methodologically very difficult.

Even though there are no firm statistics, it would be naïve to think most of our American public schools do not have gay teachers (Jackson, 2007). Historically, gay teachers have been viewed as pedophiles and perverted, with a goal of preying on students (King, 2004). In most

states, coming out as a gay teacher is a risk to one's job (Hooker, 2010). We were able to locate only one study on the hiring of gay teachers, albeit at the college-level. More than 150 freshmen at a large Midwestern university evaluated a confederate guest lecturer who mentioned his same-sex partner in half of the eight sections of the course (Russ, Simonds, & Hunt, 2002). Student ratings for competence, credibility, and character were significantly lower for the gay instructor. Furthermore, 93% of the students said they would definitely hire the straight teacher, while only 8% said they would definitely hire the gay teacher.

Countless attributes influence how we perceive others. How school principals perceive teacher candidates influence their hiring decisions. With the exception of coaching, each of the attributes described above appears in the literature on hiring discrimination. What follow is the description of how we studied this phenomenon.

METHODOLOGY

Using a publically available email list of all Michigan public school principals, we sent an email to all 3,200 principals asking them to take our short survey. In addition to asking the grade level for which they hire teachers, we asked the following 10 questions:

> *Assume there are two finalists for a teaching position at your school, Candidate A and Candidate B. Pretend that all of their other qualifications are exactly the same except one factor. How much more or less likely would you be to hire Candidate A if s/he:*
> 1. Is willing and able to coach
> 2. Has visible tattoos
> 3. Is obese
> 4. Is active in his/her church
> 5. Is Muslim
> 6. Comes from a long line of teachers
> 7. Is an atheist
> 8. Had to repeat several courses in college
> 9. Is gay
> 10. Had a 4.0 GPA in college

To respond to each question, the principals had to slide a tab along a horizontal bar, which was anchored on the far left with "much less likely" and on the far right with "much more likely". The principals were able to set the tab anywhere along the line, including the middle, equidistant from each end. Although the principals were not able to see the scale, we programmed a hidden scale from -5 to +5, corresponding with gradations along the line. In other words, if the participant dragged the tab to the far left, it recorded the value as -5; if she dragged the tab to the far right, it registered +5; if she placed the tab in the center, it recorded a score of zero; and if she stopped the tab anywhere between -5 and 0 or between 0 and +5, it recorded the corresponding integer.

It is important to acknowledge that our prompt was hypothetical, with varying levels of explicitness or transparency related to the 10 attributes. For example, it is reasonable to assume that an interviewer could determine visually during the supposed interview if a candidate were obese or had visible tattoos. A candidate's qualifications materials would likely reveal her GPA

and number of course repeats. Furthermore, it is likely that a candidate's resume could reveal attributes such as church activity and coaching experience. Other attributes, such as atheism and homosexuality, are not very likely to surface during the application and interview phase, unless the candidate explicitly reveals them. We intentionally made this ambiguous.

Despite the anonymous format of the survey, we were surveying principals' explicit biases since they were self-reporting (Macan & Merritt, 2011). Implicit, or automatic, biases are typically associated with unconscious behaviors (Lee, 2005). Even though the survey was anonymous, the principals' self-reported tendencies are likely to reveal fewer of their biases than if their implicit or automatic biases were examined (Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995).

LIMITATIONS

There were a number of limitations to this study. Although the number of respondents was high and the response rate was reasonable, we have no way of determining the representativeness of the respondents. Because their responses were anonymous, we do not know if the principals who took the survey were similar to the principals who declined, in terms of background and demographics, as well as in orientation to the questions asked. With some research (Little & Miller, 2007) suggesting that principals from rural areas are more likely to prioritize fit than principals from more populous areas, it would have be beneficial to ask the participants for characteristics about their communities. Without testing for homogeneity, the validity and generalizability of our results is uncertain.

FINDINGS

The principals reported that they were more likely to hire otherwise equally qualified candidates if they were willing to coach, had a 4.0 GPA, came from a teaching family, were active in their church, or were Muslim. Conversely, the principals reported that they were less likely to hire otherwise equally qualified candidates if they had to repeat courses in college, had visible tattoos, or were obese, atheist, or gay (see Figure 1).
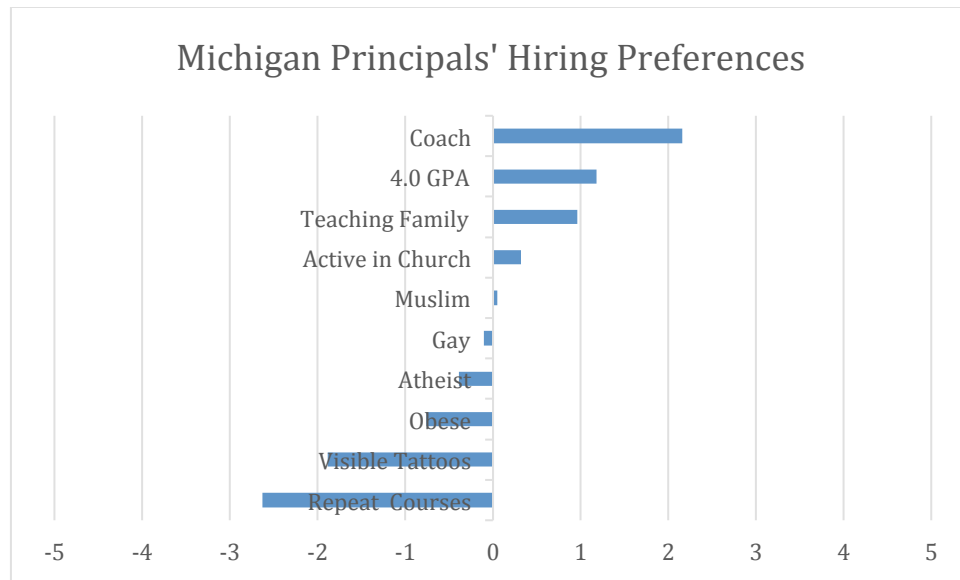
FIGURE 1: Michigan Principals' Hiring Preferences

We conducted a one-way ANOVA to compare the effect of principal grade-level on each of the 10 attributes. For only two attributes were there statistically significant differences based on grade-level of principal. Elementary principals were significantly less likely to preferentially hire a candidate based on coaching than middle and high school principals [$F(1, 308) = 43.18$, p = .000]. Additionally, elementary principals were significantly more likely than middle and high school principals to discriminate against a candidate for having visible tattoos [$F(1, 308) = 4.42$, P = .036]. For all other attributes, there were no statistically significant differences in hiring preferences or discrimination.

Table 1. Principals Hiring Preferences

Teacher Attribute:	Mean:	SD:
Is willing and able to coach	2.16	2.30
Has visible tattoos	-1.89	2.15
Is obese	-.76	1.61
Is active in his/her church	.32	1.43
Is Muslim	.05	1.52
Comes from a long line of teachers	.96	1.69
Is an atheist	-.39	1.50

Had to repeat several courses in college	-2.63	2.06
Is gay	-.10	1.38
Had a 4.0 GPA in college.	1.18	1.97

The strongest influence on the principals' hiring decisions, particularly for middle and high school principals, was the candidates' willingness and ability to coach sports. Although research on the role of coaching on principals' hiring decisions is sparse, previous research confirms that principals prefer coaches who are teachers (Brown, 2012; Curtner-Smith, 2001; Wilson, Bloom, & Harvey, 2010). Principals' preference for candidates with a 4.0 GPA and their discrimination against candidates who had to repeat courses adds fodder to the side of the unsettled debate purporting that a candidate's academic performance matters to principals (Bolz, 2009; Supon & Ryland, 2010). More important is our finding that counters the notion that principals avoid hiring high-achieving teachers (Ballou, 1996; Harris et al., 2010; Wise, 1987).

We did not survey the principals about nepotism in the narrow sense (giving preferential hiring to family members of existing employees); however, principals' preference for teacher candidates who have a family history in the profession suggests they might perceive those candidates as having a deeper commitment and understanding of the profession (Bellows, 2003; Dickson, 2012; Pfeffer, 2006).

The role of the hypothetical candidates' religiosity was mixed. Being active in one's church had a moderately positive impact on principals' hiring preferences, and being a Muslim was slightly positive. Considering that more than 75% of Americans are Christians and that teachers tend to be more religious than the population on the whole, it should come as no surprise that principals were positively biased (Kimball, et al., 2009; Slater, 2008). Although Muslims are routinely discriminated against in the job search process (Ghuman & Jackson, 2008; Park, et al., 2007; Wallace et al.; 2014 Wright et al., 2013), Michigan has one of the largest populations of Muslims in the US, which might explain why some principals noted that they would prefer the Muslim candidate. In contrast to the principals' preferences for religious candidates, they viewed atheist candidates negatively, again confirming existing research that atheists are the most detested minority group in the US today (Bramlett, 2012; Cragun, et al., 2012; Edgell, et al., 2006; Hammer, et al., 2012; Pew, 2014a).

The importance of acceptable physical appearance in the teacher hiring process has been well-documented (Mason & Schroeder, 2010), and tattoos seem to hurt one's chances of getting hired (Resenhoeft, et al., 2008; Ruetzler, et al., 2012; Swanger, 2006). Although tattoos are gaining acceptance (Pew, 2010; Wohlrab, et al., 2007), the principals in this study confirmed that tattoos are detrimental, particularly for elementary teacher candidates. Similarly, the principals expressed a bias against candidates who are obese, though at less than half the magnitude of principals' bias against tattoos. Previous research overwhelmingly concludes that obese candidates face hiring discrimination (Agerström & Rooth, 2011; Grant & Mizzi, 2014; Macan & Merritt, 2011; Roehling, 1999). As with tattoos (Rosenhoeft, et al., 2008), women who are obese face more discrimination than men (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2005; Griffin, 2007; Roehling, et al., 2007), which has heightened implication for the vast majority of elementary teacher candidates.

Finally, our principals expressed essentially a neutral position on gay candidates (-.10), reflecting society's trend toward acceptance (PEW, 2014a). Our findings add valuable insight, since no studies on the hiring of gay K-12 teachers have been published, though it appears biases against gays are reduced with teachers come out (Waldo & Kemp, 1997).

DISCUSSION

Our schools are becoming increasingly diverse – racially, culturally, religiously, and otherwise – yet, our teaching workforce remains remarkably White and female (Little & Bartlett, 2010; Zeichner, 2011). There is a general consensus that having a teacher workforce that more closely matches the demographics of the students' demographics results in increased student achievement (Kalogrides, Susanna, & B´eteille, 2011; Milner, 2012). In simple terms: students do better for teachers who are more like them (Harris, Rutledge, Ingle, & Thompson, 2010). Consequently, school administrators would be wise to hire a more diverse staff, particularly if they have a diverse student body; however, principals tend to prioritize hiring teachers who are likely to get along well with existing staff (Cranston, 2012b). Person-organization fit theory helps to explain why principals use subjective criteria to select teachers whose characteristics are similar to those of existing teachers, resulting in homogeneity (Kristoff, 1996; Little, & Miller, 2007; Schneider, 1987). Emphasis on person-organization fit motivations blind principals to teacher candidates who are dissimilar to existing staff but are effective teachers nonetheless.

The principals in this study displayed blatant biases toward and against certain teacher candidate characteristics, some of which are not related to the duties of a teacher. For example, the principals in this study were explicitly biased against obese teachers and those with tattoos. What is more, it is likely that their implicit biases are substantially greater than their explicit biases (Lee, 2005). Whereas it is pragmatic for secondary principals to want to hire teachers who can also coach, it is not clear that teacher candidates with 4.0 GPAs are more effective or that candidates who had to repeat courses are less effective. Consequently, researchers need to continue clarifying predictors of teacher effectiveness so that principals can learn if their biases are justified. Meantime, teacher candidates can use the results of this study to increase their likelihood of getting hired.

There is some potential for candidates who read this study to add to their impression management during the hiring process in order to increase their chances of getting hired. Nearly all interviewees employ some form of impression management, which can include simply highlighting certain attributes and deemphasizing others, or more deceptively and intentionally embellishing and lying (Hogue, Levashina, & Hang, 2013; Levashina & Campion, 2007; Swider, Barrick, Harris, & Stoverink, 2011). Because interviewers are poor judges of candidate deception, interviewees can use impression management to their advantage, which may or may not be ethical (Hogue et al., 2013; Posthuma, Morgeson, & Campion, 2002).

For example, if a teacher candidate with tattoos was aware of principals' biases, she could be sure to cover the tattoos during the interview. Conversely, a candidate who was willing and able to coach would want to volunteer that information during the interview in order to make herself more attractive to hire. Certainly, it would not be possible for a candidate to mask all of the attributes we included in our survey, as some characteristics are required to be included in the application materials (GPA and transcript) and others are more difficult to mask (obesity or Muslim attire). If, however, the hiring process utilized by principals is based even in small part

on characteristics that do not impact candidates' teaching effectiveness, candidates would be wise to use Self-Promotion (Paulhus, Westlake, Calvez, & Harms, 2013) to emphasize their characteristics, abilities, and experiences that principals prefer, as well as to use Image Protection (Hogue et al., 2013) to mask characteristics that might unjustly hinder their hiring.

Ultimately, school leaders need to work toward finding more objective predictors of teacher effectiveness. Because principals tend to use subjective measures of person-organization fit and because teacher candidates are able to use impression management, teacher hirers would be wise to deemphasize the interview in the hiring process. Pre-selection should be used to narrow the pool of applicants to meet the school's needs. More importantly, job-specific teaching demonstrations should be central to the teacher hiring process. If schools require candidates to teach sample lessons and use a team of teacher and administrators to assess teaching quality, schools are more likely to hire the most effective teachers available, which will have a positive impact on student learning.

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