

Y'all Ain't Fair: Discrimination against Southern Accents in Hiring Decisions

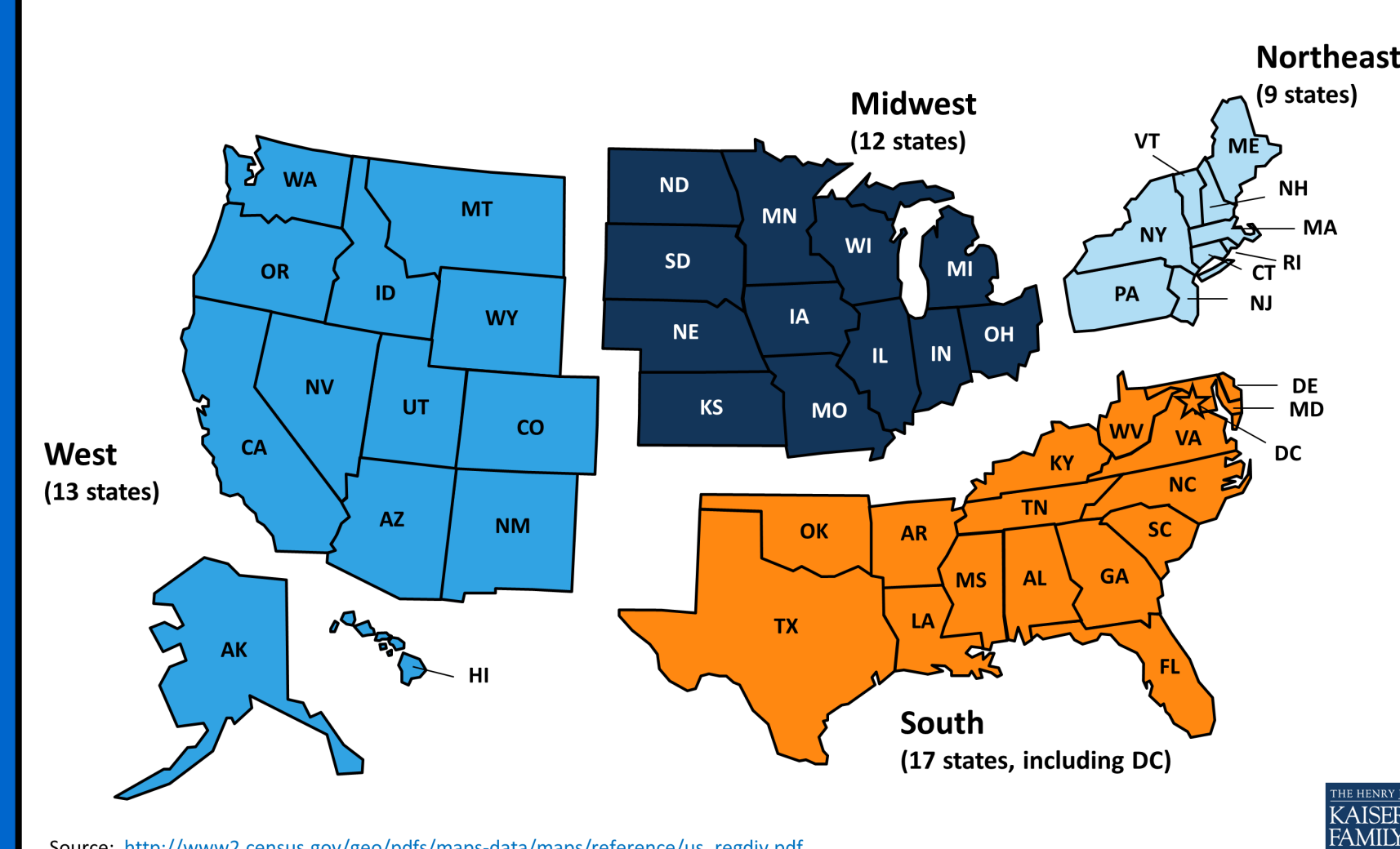
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Abstract

This research proposal investigates how southern accents impact hiring decisions. Specifically, it examines whether an applicant with a neutral American accent will be hired at a higher rate than an applicant with a southern accent. Perceived professionalism, competence, and intelligence are suggested mediators for the relationship between accent and hiring decision. Additionally, it is hypothesized that perceived similarity and geographical location will moderate the relationship between accent and evaluations related to hirability. Participants will be university students sampled from a geographically diverse range of locations.

Many studies examine hiring discrimination based on aspects of physical appearance, yet relatively fewer consider other aspects of an individual that may trigger the activation of negative stereotypes. This study seeks to fill a gap in the research and further understanding of accent-based discrimination. It also seeks to illuminate mediating and moderating factors that impact accent-based discrimination, specifically for southern accents.

Census Regions and Divisions of the United States



Introduction

While many studies have examined biases related to gender, race, and ethnicity, considerably less have evaluated the role of accents. Given that the interview process often begins with a phone call, an applicant's accent may play a large role in a hiring manager's first impressions of the applicant and subsequent evaluations of hirability.

- Negative stereotypes associated with the South
 - Educational and intellectual inferiority, 'backwardness,' and lower socioeconomic status (Campbell-Kibler, 2007; Clark et al, 2011; Reed, 1974)
 - Demonstrated in derogatory nicknames referring to Southerners such as hillbilly, redneck, and bubba (Hartigan, 2003; Picket et al., 2002)
- Similarity-Attraction Hypothesis
 - Demographic variables affect evaluations of an applicant based on the extent to which they cause the decision-maker to view the applicant as similar or dissimilar
- Hypotheses
 - *H1*: An applicant with a neutral American accent will have a higher rate of positive hiring recommendations than an applicant with a southern accent.
 - *H2*: Perceived professionalism, competence, and intelligence will mediate the relationship between accent and hiring decision.
 - *H3*: Perceived similarity will moderate the relationship between accent and hiring evaluations.
 - *H4*: Geographical area will moderate perceived similarity such that participants living in non-South regions will perceive greater dissimilarity between themselves and an applicant with a southern accent.
 - *H5*: Due to differences in perceived similarity, participants living in non-South regions will be less likely to recommend hiring an applicant with a southern accent.

Methodology

- Participants
 - 200 undergraduates recruited from a geographically diverse range of universities located in the South, West, Northeast, and Midwest
- Procedure
 - Participants will be randomly assigned to one of four conditions: female applicant with a neutral accent, female applicant with a southern accent, male applicant with a neutral accent, and male applicant with a southern accent
 - Shown a job description of a human resources manager and then listen to an audio recording of an interview with an applicant for the position
 - Evaluate the applicant's professionalism, competence, intelligence, similarity to themselves, and make a hiring recommendation regarding the applicant

Anticipated Results

- Data will be analyzed with moderated regression analysis, mediated regression analysis, and multivariate analysis of variance.
- Results are expected to support the stated hypotheses, such that applicants with a neutral accent will receive more positive hiring recommendations than applicants with a southern accent.
- It is expected that perceptions of professionalism, competence, and intelligence will explain this relationship, with the geographic location of the participant and perceived similarity impacting this relationship as well.

Discussion

- Theoretical and Practical Implications
 - If discrimination is present against southern accents, it is possible other types of accents may be discriminated against as well.
 - If geographic location is a significant moderator, the degree of discrimination against southern accents may vary depending on where the organization is located.
 - Hiring managers should be aware of potential biases they may hold against a job candidate based on their accent.
- Future Directions
 - Investigate the potential role of job complexity (discrimination may occur more in highly complex jobs, where factors like perceived competency, professionalism, and intelligence may be more highly valued)
 - Explore other potential mediators and moderators
 - Sample from an older, more diverse population than college students

Conclusion

This study seeks to add to the body of research on accent-based discrimination and to illuminate the mechanisms behind accent-based discrimination in hiring decisions. It aims to provide insight into the potential consequences of regional stereotypes and how negative stereotypes may impact individuals during the interview process.

Acknowledgements

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