MEAGHAN LANDRY & RYAN YACKNOVETS

Discrimination Against Transgender Nonbinary Teaching Applicants During the Hiring Process

Transgender and genderqueer people regularly face discrimination, especially when it comes to employment and the hiring process (Hebl et al., 2002; Nadler & Kufahl, 2014; Reed et al., 2015); however, these groups are often underrepresented in psychological research. The current study aims to add to the research literature by investigating potential hiring biases against transgender nonbinary individuals (TNBIs) applying for teaching positions. More specifically, do participants feel comfortable hiring TNBIs as teachers, especially when the job involves working with younger children? A total of 276 participants between the ages of 18 and 53 were randomly assigned to read one of two teaching applicants' résumés, which contained their work experience, education, and additional qualifications. The résumés of both job applicants were differentiated only by the pronouns they used (she/her or they/them), as well as by their membership in a teachers' association (the Association for Teachers of Toronto or the Association for Transgendered Teachers of Toronto). In the current study, the independent variable was the gender identity of the applicant (TNBI or cisgender woman) and the dependent variable was the grade level that participants recommended the applicant teach. We conclude that TNBIs were significantly more likely to be recommended for teaching positions involving older children when compared to equally qualified cisgender applicants, thus revealing underlying discrimination during the hiring process.

Keywords: Transgender, nonbinary, hiring discrimination, teaching, implicit bias

For decades, the LGBTQ+ community has called for greater representation and inclusion of the diverse identities that exist outside of the gender binary, including transgender and genderqueer people. Despite regularly facing discrimination in all walks of life, especially when it comes to employment, these groups are critically underrepresented in psychological research (Everly et al., 2016; Hebl et al., 2002;

Horvath & Ryan, 2003; Nadler & Kufahl, 2014; Reed et al., 2015). The current study aims to increase representation of these groups by investigating hiring biases against transgender nonbinary individuals (TNBIs) applying for teaching positions. Study participants were presented with a brief hiring scenario and one of two hypothetical résumés. The independent variable was the gender of the teaching applicant (either cisgender female or transgender nonbinary), and the dependent variable was the grade level recommended by research participants (junior kindergarten to grade 8). Although this bias could be more accurately described as one of grade placement, bias against TNBI teaching applicants in grade assignment or placement is still indicative of bias within the hiring process. Given the lack of research on this community and the struggles they face, we believe it is important to properly identify this bias as a form of hiring discrimination.

As previously stated, psychological research involving trans and genderqueer individuals is severely lacking. The few studies that do explore these biases (Horvath & Ryan, 2003; Reed et al., 2015; Rad et al., 2019; Norton & Herek, 2013) remain within the male-female dichotomy by choosing to only observe either transwomen or transmen. It is important, however, to attempt to understand the particular challenges and lived experiences of those who identify outside of this binary. Since there is no agreed upon definition of transgender nonbinary presented in psychological research, we opt to define TNBI using various medical articles (Bass et al., 2018; Conlin et el., 2019; Liszewski et al., 2018; Moseson et al., 2020; Valente et al., 2020), as these definitions are clear and accurately reflect those presented in the fields of Trans and Gender Studies (Stryker et al., 2008; Enke, 2012; Tinsley, 2016). Additionally, it is important to note that the acronym "TNBI" was added to this paper for the sake of brevity and is not in any way intended as a medicalization of trans identities. For the purpose of this study, *transgender* is defined as an umbrella term that encompasses any individual whose gender identity does not match the gender they were assigned at birth. Moreover, *nonbinary*, which functions as an extension of trans identity, is defined as an individual who is neither male nor female. Conversely, we defined *cisgender* as an individual whose gender identity matches the one they were assigned at birth (either male or female). The specific question that guided this study was: Will the gender identity of an applicant for a teaching position influence the grade level they are assigned? It was hypothesized that participants would be less likely to hire TNBIs to teach children in the primary level (junior kindergarten to grade 3), when compared to cisgender applicants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recently, researchers have attempted to pinpoint behaviours or beliefs that are correlated with anti-transgender and anti-gay attitudes in people. One such belief is the misconception that gay and trans people are in control of their sexuality and gender identity, and make these choices to trick or deceive people (Horvath & Ryan,

2003; Reed et al., 2015; Rad et al., 2019). In their study, Reed et al. (2015) found that participants were more likely to rate transgender people as mentally ill if they also believed that being transgender was a dangerous and rare condition that was under the individual's control. Additionally, Rad et al. (2019) found that participants rated transgender people who had undergone gender confirmation surgery more positively than those who did not. The authors explained that this procedure supposedly signifies a stronger commitment to one's gender identity and reduces the ambiguity of one's gender presentation, making it easier for cisgender people to classify them. Thus, the majority of trans individuals who choose to undergo gender-confirming procedures can still be categorized within the gender binary. TNBIs, however, cannot. As a result, will they be perceived more negatively than other trans individuals because of the perceived ambiguity of their gender?

Researchers also identified heterosexism, political conservatism, anti-egalitarian attitudes, and authoritarianism as good predictors of transphobic attitudes, since they are often associated with intolerance of ambiguity, resistance to change, and rigid beliefs in the binary gender system and its associated gender roles (Horvath & Ryan, 2003; Norton & Herek, 2013; Reed et al., 2015). Furthermore, these studies suggest that ideas about gender roles and the importance of sex are more prevalent among men, leading them to have stronger anti-trans and anti-gay attitudes. This could be attributed to their being more interested in upholding traditional gender norms and power hierarchies (Reed et al., 2015; Rad et al., 2019; Norton & Herek, 2013). According to Norton & Herek (2013), transgender people, gay men, and lesbians challenge social and gender norms, which many men see as a threat to their own masculinity and heterosexuality. TNBIs, however, may challenge these notions more so than other gender or sexual minorities, since they do not adhere to traditional, binary gender norms and presentations. Therefore, we expected that male participants in the current study would be more likely to recommend TNBI applicants to teach older grades, possibly to protect younger children from the perceived perversion of these norms.

Research also indicates that men are more prejudiced towards sexual and gender minorities when it comes to hiring decisions (Everly et al., 2016; Horvath & Ryan, 2003). These studies suggest that men believe there are negative consequences to hiring gays and lesbians (Horvath & Ryan, 2003), and are less likely to hire homosexuals because they perceive them to be less competent (Everly et al., 2016; Horvath & Ryan, 2003). Although women also share some of these biases, Everly et al. (2016) found that they were more tolerant and accepting of gays and lesbians in the workplace. In fact, their study concluded that female participants rated homosexual applicants more favourably than heterosexual applicants.

Other studies on hiring bias suggest that applicants who are assumed to be gay are perceived more negatively than heterosexual applicants (Hebl et el., 2002; Horvath & Ryan, 2003; Irwin, 2002). Hebl et al. (2002) found that participants who

entered a store to ask for a job wearing a hat that said "Gay and Proud" faced more interpersonal discrimination (e.g., increased negativity, hostile and unhelpful behaviours, disinterest) than those who entered a store wearing a hat that read "Texan and Proud." Similarly, LeCroy & Rodefer (2019) found that applicants who were affiliated with an LGBTQ+ association on their résumé (whether they were gay or simply an ally) received a more negative rating. Although these studies do not directly address issues related to bias against transgender people, the results are important, as attitudes towards gays and lesbians are strongly correlated with attitudes towards transgender people (Norton & Herek, 2013).

In terms of hiring bias against transgender people, Reed et al. (2015) asked participants to rate an applicant's mental health and the degree to which they would recommend hiring them as a radiologic technician after reviewing their résumés. Researchers found that transgender applicants were rated as more mentally ill, which in turn negatively affected the likelihood of their receiving a hiring recommendation. Since Reed et al. (2015) found that being transgender was associated with fewer hiring recommendations, the current study asked: Would participants differentially recommend cisgender and transgender applicants to teach children of different ages? We expected participants to display a grade assignment bias in that they would be more likely to hire cisgender applicants to teach younger children (i.e., at the primary level) than to hire TNBIs for the same position.

METHODS
Participants
This study was done in the context of a class project for a university in Toronto, Canada. Study participants consisted of 276 individuals recruited through email or social media by a group of student researchers. Half (n=138) received the résumé of a cisgender applicant, and half (n=138) received the résumé of a TNBI applicant. Demographic information collected was abnormally distributed, with a greater number of participants being young, female, and South Asian. Although these demographics are not necessarily representative of the Canadian population, they were representative of the pool of student researchers, who recruited from their own social networks.

As shown in Table 1, all the study participants were between the ages of 18 and 53 (*Mean [M]*=22.9, *Standard Deviation [SD]*=7.9, *Median [Mdn]*=19). The majority of respondents identified as female (65.2%) and the rest identified as either male (33.3%) or genderqueer/nonbinary (1.4%). As for ethnicity, participants were allowed to select any and all relevant categories. The most frequent selections were South Asian (26.1%), followed by Western European (19.2%), and Southern European (15.2%).

Table 1. Distribution of Participant Demographic Information

	Cisgender (control)	Nonbinary (experimental)
Age (*Median*)	19.5	19
Gender Identity		
Female	100	80
Male	35	57
Genderqueer/Nonbinary	3	1
Ethnic Background		
African	15	6
Caribbean	4	14
Asian	57	54
European	67	56
Central/South American	8	7

Note. For the sake of brevity, some of the options for ethnicity were combined. For the full list of ethnicities, see Appendix A.

Materials

Study participants read a consent form outlining the purpose of the study, its potential risks and benefits, the estimated time needed for completion, and a reminder of the guaranteed confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation. This document also provided participants with the names and contact information of the researchers, if they had questions or concerns.

In addition, two hypothetical résumés were used. This method was chosen because it was shown to be effective in measuring hiring discrimination in previous studies (Everly et al., 2016; Horvath & Ryan, 2003; LeCroy & Rodefer, 2019; Nadler & Kufahl, 2014). Both résumés included a (fictitious) applicant's name (Cameron Smith) and preferred pronouns (she/her or they/them). They also contained additional (fictitious) contact information (i.e., home address, email, and phone number); educational background (B.A. and B.Ed. from Queen's University); work history (student teacher at Darwin Elementary [2 years], teacher at Oakland Middle School [2 years], teacher at Richview Kindergarten [2 years]); a short list of relevant skills (organization, teamwork, communication); and membership in a teaching

organization (either the Association for Teachers of Toronto or the Association for Transgendered Teachers of Toronto). The items included on the résumés were the same for each applicant, except for their preferred pronouns and the name of the organization they were affiliated with. This information was used to manipulate the gender identity of the job applicant (cisgender or transgender nonbinary), which varied depending on the condition to which the participant was randomly assigned. See Appendix B for the cisgender résumé and Appendix C for the transgender nonbinary résumé.

Next, this study required a Google Forms questionnaire. The first section included four multiple-choice questions: one designed to measure the dependent variable, which is the grade level participants believe the applicant would be best suited to teach, and three other camouflage questions. These questions were included to distract participants from the true aim of the study. The second section included three fixed-choice questions about participants' age, gender identity, and ethnic background (see Appendices D and A).

Finally, this experiment involved passive deception, meaning that at the time of recruitment and in the informed consent page, we did not tell participants that we would be measuring hiring bias against TNBIs for teaching positions, but only that we were measuring factors involved in hiring decisions. As a result, we required a short debrief message which thanked the respondents for their participation, explained the true purpose of the study (i.e., measuring potential hiring discrimination against transgender nonbinary applicants for teaching positions with young children), and asked them not to discuss the study with any other possible respondents to avoid compromising the results.

Procedure
Participants were told at the time of recruitment, as well as on the informed consent page, that this experiment would examine factors involved in hiring decisions. The purpose of this passive deception was to focus respondents attention on the applicants' qualifications and away from their gender identity. The participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and anonymous, and that there would be no consequences for refusing to participate. The form also gave a brief description of how to complete the study, explaining that respondents would be asked to read a résumé and answer a brief questionnaire. If they selected "Agree," they were presented with a randomization question that directed them to either the control (cisgender) condition or the experimental (transgender nonbinary) condition. This randomization question was a mandatory question at the beginning of the Google Forms questionnaire. Participants were presented with two symbols (@ and !) and asked to choose which one appeared first on their screen. Those who clicked "@" were shown the résumé of a cisgender woman, and those who clicked "!" were

shown the résumé of a TNBI. The order of the symbols was randomized by Google Forms.

After being randomly assigned to a condition, respondents in both groups were presented with the following scenario:

> Imagine you are a volunteer member of your local school board and you have been asked to sit on the hiring committee for next fall's new hires. You are evaluating one of the short-listed candidates for an elementary school. Please review this candidate's résumé and answer the questions below.

Participants in the control condition were asked to read the résumé of a cisgender applicant who used she/her pronouns and was a member of the Association for Teachers of Toronto. Participants in the experimental condition were asked to read the résumé of a transgender nonbinary applicant who used gender-neutral they/them pronouns and belonged to the Association for Transgendered Teachers of Toronto. All other elements of the résumé (including name, education, work experience, and skills) remained the same so that both applicants were equal in terms of qualifications. After reviewing the résumé, participants were asked: "Which grade would you most likely recommend this applicant teach?" Respondents were then given the option to select any grade between junior kindergarten and grade 8 (see Appendix D). To analyze participants' responses, researchers then converted each answer into the average age of a child in that grade (e.g., the average age of a junior kindergartener was four years old). This conversion was based on the Ontario school system. The participants were also asked to answer three camouflage questions on a scale of one to seven. Since these questions were only included in the study to further distract participants from the gender identity of the applicants and reduce the likelihood of a social desirability bias, an analysis of these answers was not conducted.

Finally, participants were asked to fill out a short questionnaire. Once their answers were submitted, they received a debrief message.

RESULTS
This study looked at the grade level that participants recommended a cisgender woman and a transgender nonbinary individual (TNBI) teach. As previously mentioned, to compute this data, researchers changed the actual responses (the recommended grade level) to the average age of children in that grade (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Figure 1. Frequency Distribution of Scores in the Cisgender Condition
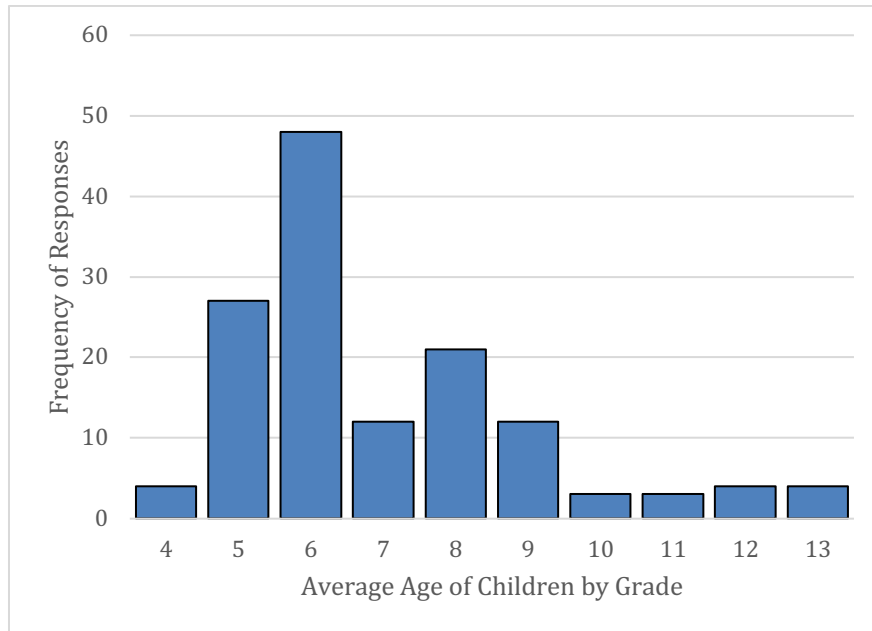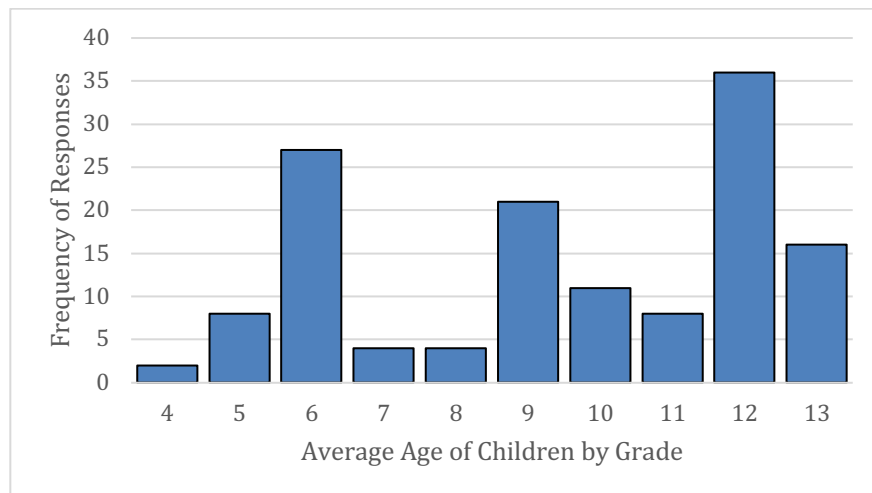

Figure 2. Frequency Distribution of Scores in the Transgender Nonbinary Condition

The measures of central tendency, standard deviations and sample sizes (n) for each group were calculated and are found in Table 2. Using the means of the two samples, we performed a two-tailed, independent measures t-test for unequal variances. On average, as shown in Figure 3, participants recommend that TNBIs teach older children (*M*=9.47, *SD*=2.75), compared to cisgender applicants

(*M*=6.97, *SD*=2.06). The difference of 2.5 years between conditions was significant [$t(137) = -8.56$, $p < .001$], which supports the researchers' hypothesis that there is a grade placement bias against TNBIs teaching younger children. Specifically, participants were more likely to assign a cisgender applicant to teach lower grades than a TNBI applicant.

Table 2. Descriptive Results in Each Condition

	Cisgender (control)	Transgender (experimental)
Sample (*n*)	138	138
Mean Age of Children (*M*)	6.97	9.47
Median (*Mdn*)	6	10
Standard Deviation (*SD*)	2.06	2.75

Figure 3. Comparison of Condition Means
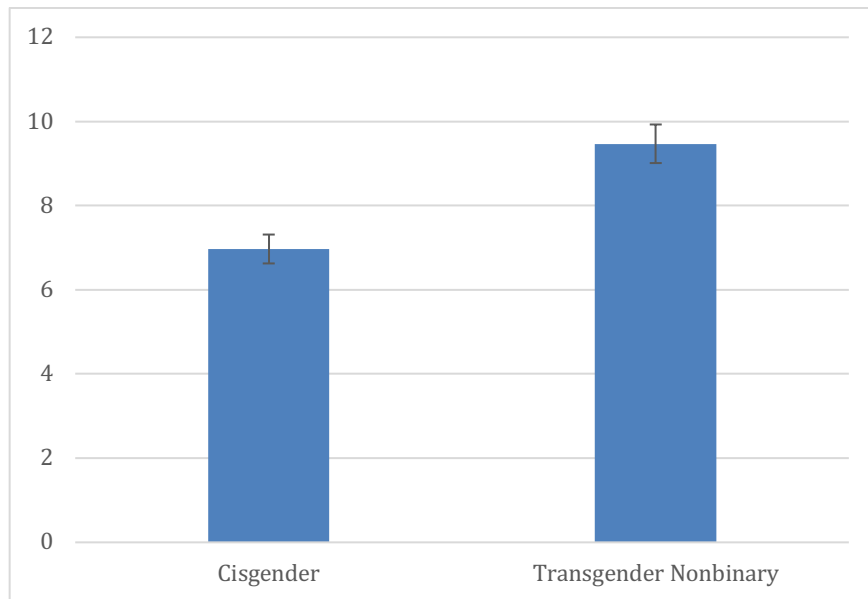
DISCUSSION

This study found that, when compared to cisgender applicants, TNBIs were assigned to teach significantly higher grades. In particular, we found that participants were

less likely to recommend TNBIs to teach younger grades (junior kindergarten to grade 3) and more likely to recommend that they teach older grades (grades 4 to 8). These results demonstrate a bias against TNBIs when it comes to grade assignment and, more broadly, a hiring bias in child care professions such as teaching. This discrepancy may be due to factors such as perceived mental illness, pre-existing biases in the population, and gender stereotypes. For example, transgender individuals are often seen as deceptive, mentally ill, dangerous, and a threat to the gender binary (Horvath & Ryan, 2003; Reed et al., 2015; Rad et al., 2019). Therefore, it would be reasonable to conclude that such beliefs lead people to be untrusting of transgender individuals, especially in situations involving children. However, studies which explore these negative views are lacking and those that exist to date do not examine biases against TNBIs in particular. For this reason, further studies need to be conducted in order to determine not only how deeply these biases are ingrained in society, but also how they should be addressed. This research should explore the breadth of contexts in which TNBIs may experience prejudice and discrimination, beyond child care and hiring contexts.

The gender of participants may have also played a role in the results of this study. Past research has shown that men are more likely to hold negative biases when hiring sexual and gender minorities (Everly et al., 2016; Horvath & Ryan, 2003). As a result, we would expect male participants to show more bias against TNBIs—for example, recommending that they teach older grades—whereas we would expect female participants to show less bias. Since the majority of participants identified as female (65.2%), this meant that we would expect the results to demonstrate little to no hiring bias against TNBI applicants. However, contrary to the findings of Everly et al. (2016) and Horvath & Ryan (2003), this was not the case. This led us to ask: Does gender play the same role in anti–nonbinary bias as it does with anti-transgender bias? More importantly, can anti-gay and anti-transgender bias be used to reliably predict anti-nonbinary bias? Consequently, future research should focus on answering such questions and on further defining the impact of participant gender.

Another way that gender could have impacted the results is through the cisgender condition. Due to the fact that cisgender women are generally perceived as warm and nurturing compared to men (He et al., 2019; Hoyt, 2012), caregiving scenarios and situational cues often activate gender biases and female stereotypes (Hoyt, 2012). Since the control résumé used she/her pronouns and was assumed to be female, it is possible that the teaching scenario presented at the beginning of this study activated these stereotypes, impacting participants' perceptions of this candidate and resulting in participants favouring her for younger grades. In comparison, transgender individuals are often seen as dangerous and untrustworthy (Horvath & Ryan, 2003; Reed et al., 2015; Rad et al., 2019), which may have triggered the opposite reaction in participants faced with the same teaching scenario. Future research should therefore include additional conditions, such as a résumé

with he/him pronouns, to gain a better understanding of the effect of gender identities in this context.

Finally, to the knowledge of the researchers, very little research exists on the topic of transgender individuals and even less on TNBIs. Therefore, this study can be considered exploratory and, given the significance of its results, additional research is essential. Future research should explore questions such as: Is the bias against TNBIs conscious or unconscious? What would be the implication of adding he/him pronouns to a study on hiring bias against TNBIs? Would these results vary depending on the job they apply for (i.e., female- vs. male-dominated professions)? Lastly, would including older students (at the secondary level) increase the recommended grade level in the TNBI condition and consequently increase the difference between the conditions? Such research is an important first step in understanding the discrimination that TNBIs regularly face, in order to combat these biases through education and give rise to changes in policy.

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APPENDIX A
Demographics Questionnaire

Demographic Questions:

1. Age: _____

2. Gender: Female
                 Male
                 Gender non-conforming/nonbinary
                 Other

3. Please select the <u>heritage</u> group(s) with which you identify:

____ African	____ Caribbean
____ South Asian	____ East Asian
____ South East Asian	____ Middle Eastern
____ Western European	____ Eastern European
____ Southern European	____ Central/South American
____ Indigenous	____ Other (please specify): _____

APPENDIX B
Cisgender Applicant Resume

Cameron Smith (she/her)

4700 Keele St.
Toronto, ON
(416) 576-xxxx
Csmith@xxxx

Experience

Richview Kindergarten: Teacher
2018–2020
Taught in several kindergarten classes.

Oakland Middle School: Teacher
2016–2018
Taught students in grades 7 and 8.

Darwin Elementary: Student teacher
2014–2016
Student teacher for classes in grades 3 and 4.

Education

Queen's University, English, B.A.
2010–2014
Graduated with honours.

Queen's University, B.Ed.
2014–2016
Graduated with honours
- Primary and Junior Divisions
- Intermediate Division: English

Skills

Very organized.
I work well in groups.
Excellent communicator.

References

Principal T. Sheperd
Oakland Middle School.
C. Hoover
Darwin Elementary School.

Languages

English (oral and written)
French (oral and written)

Other

Member, Association for Teachers of Toronto

APPENDIX C
Transgender Nonbinary Individual (TNBI) Applicant Résumé

Cameron Smith (she/her)

4700 Keele St.
Toronto, ON
(416) 576-xxxx
Csmith@xxxx

Experience

Richview Kindergarten: Teacher
2018–2020
Taught in several kindergarten classes.

Oakland Middle School: Teacher
2016–2018
Taught students in grades 7 and 8.

Darwin Elementary: Student teacher
2014–2016
Student teacher for classes in grades 3 and 4.

Education

Queen's University, English, B.A.
2010–2014
Graduated with honours.

Queen's University, B.Ed.
2014–2016
Graduated with honours
- Primary and Junior Divisions
- Intermediate Division: English

Skills

Very organized.
I work well in groups.
Excellent communicator.

References

Principal T. Sheperd
Oakland Middle School.
C. Hoover
Darwin Elementary School.

Languages

English (oral and written)
French (oral and written)

Other

Member, Association for Transgender Teachers of Toronto

APPENDIX D

Questionnaire for Perceived Level of Qualification and Camouflage Questions

Questionnaire:

1. Which grade would you most likely recommend this applicant teach?

    ___ Junior kindergarten
    ___ Senior kindergarten
    ___ Grade 1
    ___ Grade 2
    ___ Grade 3
    ___ Grade 4
    ___ Grade 5
    ___ Grade 6
    ___ Grade 7
    ___ Grade 8

2. How easily do you think this candidate would build rapport with students regardless of assigned grade?

    1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7

    Not easily at all   Very easily

3. How easily do you think this candidate would build rapport with

    colleagues?

    1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7

    Not easily at all   Very easily

4. What is the candidate's demonstrated level of commitment to a teaching

    career?

    1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7

    Not easily at all   Very easily