The Effect of Attractiveness within the Hiring Process

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Abstract

The relation between attractiveness and hiring for a prospective employee was examined using students from a University Psychology course (n=20), in which each student received one of two packets, with 6 pairs of randomly assigned photographs and resume, and asked to pick the best candidate for the job. A repeated measures 2x2 (Attractiveness vs. Qualification) ANOVA design was used to determine if there was a relationship. To measure the attractiveness, a photograph of a male significantly above or below average in attractiveness rating according to a website poll was used. To measure the qualifications, highly-qualified individual resumes and irrelevant resumes for the position open were used. The data collected showed no evidence of any significant effect, thus, not supporting our hypothesis that physical attractiveness boosts a male candidate's chances of being hired for an opening position by a male employer.
The Effect of Attractiveness within the Hiring Process

The Federal laws for Equal Opportunity Employment state that a qualified individual will not be discriminated against race, color, religion, national origin or sex, but it does not mention anything about physical attractiveness. The “what is beautiful is good” bias, which states that if someone is attractive, then they must be healthier and well-adjusted to everything than an unattractive person, seems almost universal and has been detected in a variety of different cultures (Dion, Berscheid & Walster, 1972). Using a wide spectrum of cultural background within the employers, Dion demonstrated that the “what is beautiful is good” bias, is present in all cultures, when the prospective employees are closely matched in qualification. Attractive individuals are thought to have better professional lives, stable martial relationships and personalities, according to previous studies.

There has been much research to see if physical attractiveness is a factor in hiring, and the result is that the more attractive the person is, the greater the chances of being hired (Watkins & Johnston, 2000). Watkin's study manipulated variables such as applicant sex, type of job and attractiveness, to see whether there is a relationship between hiring and applicant personal quality, using a questionnaire on college students asking personality questions about a certain person using photographs. They found that attractive people were thought to have better personalities.

In Dipoyle's experiment, resumes with either attractive or unattractive applicant photographs were given to 105 interviewers, who rated applicants on certain criteria. The photographs were rated by a group of students that were separate to the main study, and were blind as to the purpose of the study (Dipboye, R, Fromkin, H, & Wiback, K.,1975). The study was conducted by distributing a single resume with a randomly assigned attractive or unattractive photograph to participants. Results from
this experiment demonstrated that physical attractiveness does, in fact, influence employment decisions. Another study asked college students to rate resumes with a photograph of the applicant for one of two jobs, a traditionally male managerial job or a traditionally female non-managerial job (Heilman & Saruwatari, 1979). Subjects were told that all applicants had recently graduated and had been pre-screened on the basis of educational and background qualifications. The results showed that attractiveness was an advantage for male applicants but was an advantage only for females seeking traditionally female jobs (Heilman et al, 1979). The attractiveness bias comes into play mainly when candidates are closely matched in qualification for the position (Schneider, Marlowe, & Nelson, 2004).

Other studies have shown that organizations can promote the development of stereotypes, that can cause a bias within the hiring process (Dickey-Bryant, Lautenschlager, Mendoza & Abrahams, 1986). In Dickey-Bryant's experiment, students rated the success of various military institution graduates in future employment, using photographs from an old yearbook. The results showed that there was a significant bias for certain types of people to be favored over others, based on their “sharper” appearance.

In our study, we will use similar methods to Heilman and Saruwatari, but test the bias within males against other males. Much previous research was mostly done based on gender preference, showing that males were preferred for managerial positions over females (Schneider et al., 1996). Attractive males were preferred over unattractive females when hiring for a supervisory job (Dipboye, et al. 1975). Previous research indicated that males and females alike are more apt to hire attractive candidates over unattractive candidates with regards to a managerial position (Schneider et al., 1996). There has not been much research using only same sex hiring same sex applicants, thus, we have investigated the role of attractiveness using undergraduate male participants, evaluating resumes with attached photographs of male applicants to determine who will be most desirable for the position. Studies show that students tend to rate less harshly and more favorably than professional employers
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(Dipboye, et al. 1975). Our study is unique in that we are using male participants to evaluate male applicants to see if physical attractiveness truly plays a role in hiring, whereas previous research tended to focus on mixed gender job applicants and their male or female application raters. We hypothesize that attractive applicants would be more likely to be hired over not as attractive applicants given similar qualifications on the resumes for positions in management.

Methods

Participants

We had a convenience sample of 20 male college students from the Introduction to Psychology course in Clarkson University between the ages of 18 and 25. The Participants were given a verbal description of the experiment and signed an informed consent document. The procedure was approved by the CU IRB.

Materials

In this experiment we used, 12 different Resumes (see Appendix A), 6 high and 6 low qualified, each was randomly assigned to a photograph of the applicant for a managerial position, 6 attractive and 6 unattractive. The photographs were selected from the website [www.hotornot.com](http://www.hotornot.com), in which millions of people rate photographs of people on a predetermined scale of 0-10. Our mean of the attractive photographs was 9.08 and the mean score for the unattractive was 1.95. These randomly paired resumes were given to subjects in a single packet, separated into two resumes and blind page with instructions to choose the most qualified of the two with a check mark. All participants were also given the job description that the applicants were applying for (see Appendix B) included within the package.

Design
The experiment used a 2-by-2 repeated measures design. The independent variables were degree of attractiveness and level of job qualification for the managerial position.

Procedure

The resume packets were handed to participants and were then instructed to remain seated until everyone was finished.

Results

A Repeated Measures ANOVA was calculated using the data collected. The main effect for qualification ($F(1, 18) = .045, p > .05$) and interaction ($F(1, 18) = .035, p > .05$), demonstrate that there was no significant effect seen. Our hypothesis was not supported with the sample data that was collected in this experiment. Thus, there is no evidence to sustain the claim that an attractive male has a higher chance of acquiring a position over a less attractive male when evaluated by another male.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of attractiveness on hiring on a male candidate by a male employer. The data collected and results of the repeated measures ANOVA indicate that there is no effect on hiring from applicant attractiveness (See Figure 1). These results conflict with various past studies that prove that physical attractiveness does indeed play a role in the hiring process. According to Dion, even though our experiment consisted of Caucasian males, that should not affect the results. We did not keep the resumes constant, like in Dipoyle's experiment, and that could have led to not seeing the interaction. Other limitations and restrictions that influenced our experiment include the sample of college students not taking the material seriously, mistakes within organization within the group when handling data and calculations, and poorly constructed resumes. During the experiment,
questions aroused from the subjects, as to not picking either of the provided candidates, and others coming to the end of the packet within an unreasonably short amount of time to have looked through the resumes thoroughly, raising question as to the level of seriousness that subjects took the experiment. There is a possibility that subjects marked down random applicants just as subjects could have picked a candidate because of other attributes other than those we were looking for, like academic major or permanent address state hometown. The resume attributes were not held constant like all other studies did, and this is a confound within our study. An example, placing an engineer and a modern dancer as a pair for the managerial position. Another restriction within our experimental design was the question proposed to the subject as, “Of the following two resumes, pick the applicant best suited for the job”. With a simple “yes” or “no” answer, there is very little variability to be expected. Finally, it should be noted that the encoding for this experiment's resume and photograph pairs was withheld from my partner and I, by the other half of the group, leaving us to interpret the results differently. The effect and interaction were not significant in either case, and we do not claim that the results of this experiment could be used in generalization to the public or as support any hiring biases.
References


Appendices

Appendix A

(2x2 Head Shots of 6 Attractive Males used)

(2x2 Head Shots of 6 Unattractive Males used)
Appendix B

District Manager
Company: Olyveoys

DESCRIPTION:
*Olyveoys is engaged in the business of retail food sales. We are currently looking for a District Manager for our Northeastern New York restaurants.

JOB OVERVIEW:
*To assist with the profitable operation of Olyveoys restaurant within the practices and procedures established by Company operations, having sole responsibility for the restaurant.

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES:

8 Controls daily operations by scheduling labor, ordering food and supplies, and developing the restaurant team.
9 Maintains inventory, manages labor, review financial reports, and takes appropriate actions.
10 Ensures compliance with all Human Resources practices and applicable labor laws.
11 Recruits, interviews, and hires team members, conducts performance appraisals, counsels, motivates, and trains entire team inclusive of developing Assistant Managers.
12 Ensure company standards on equipment, facilities, and grounds are maintained.
13 Managers must communicate effectively with employees, supervise them and ensure that each shift is managed efficiently; train and develop employees; observe and guide employees as they perform their assignment, reallocating labor as needed and coordinating overall operations.

REQUIREMENTS:

14 High School AND College diploma.
15 Must have minimum of 6 months managerial or supervisory experience in the Food Service Industry.
16 Must have effective oral and written communication skills.
17 Ability to make decisions and remain calm in stressful situations.
18 Ability to calculate and analyze data.
19 Display effective leadership skills.
20 Effectively communicate with all levels.
21 Must be computer literate.

BENEFITS OFFERED:
*Paid Vacation
*Meals Included
*Medical and other insurance plans
*Flexible work schedules
*Referral Program
Author Notes

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### Table 1

**Mean Hiring for Attractive and Unattractive Males in the Low Quality and High Quality Conditions**

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<tr>
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<th>Low Quality</th>
<th>High Quality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attractive</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unattractive</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.45</td>
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</tbody>
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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Repeated Measures ANOVA Results Line Graph
Effects of Attractiveness on Hiring