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Effects of Cosmetics on Impression Formation of a Female's Work Ability

Elizabeth West

Radford University

April 11, 2008

Abstract

This study explored whether Caucasian women would be evaluated differently depending on whether or not they were wearing cosmetics. Twenty five participants (19 women, 6 men) tested the hypothesis that a job applicant not wearing cosmetics would be perceived as more qualified, capable, and hireable when their resume was evaluated. The results indicate that cosmetic use did not have a significant effect on the favorability of the applicants or if the candidates would have a good chance of being hired for the jobs they were applying for.

Effects of Cosmetics on Impressions of a Female's Work Ability

When hiring new employees, businesses review a job applicant's resume and credentials. One would assume a business' decision to hire someone would be based on factors including employment history, education, skills, and abilities. However, impressions of others can be influenced by gender, race, age, and physical attractiveness stereotypes (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). This stereotyping can influence decision making when deciding on which applicant to hire. Past literature shows that physical attractiveness is a stereotype that affects an employer's hiring decision, especially when an applicant is female (Cox & Glick, 1986).

Past psychological studies have implied that well groomed applicants were more likely to be hired than poorly groomed applicants (Mack & Rainey, 1990). For males, a full-bearded or a clean-shaven applicant is favored over mustached applicants when making a final hiring decision (Shannon & Stark, 2003). For females, women wearing makeup were perceived as being more confident and healthy. Women wearing makeup were also viewed as having a greater salary and were thought to have more prestigious jobs over women not wearing makeup (Nash, Fieldman, Hussy, Lévêque, & Pineau, 2006).

Contrary to these findings, some studies have found that females not wearing makeup are more likely to be hired. Cosmetic use is a feminine characteristic. Female characteristics have been associated with negative work related evaluations (Davis, 1987). One study explored cosmetic use for a gender-typed (secretary) position and a nongender-typed (accountant) position. Different levels of makeup had no significant effect when the woman was applying for an accountant position. When an applicant wearing cosmetics applying for the secretary position was evaluated, it was found that she was judged to have a low work performance rating (Cox &

Glick, 1986). Another study indicated that women not wearing makeup were assigned a higher salary by participants and were seen as more capable. Brunettes were also given a higher salary and rated more capable, as opposed to women with blonde or red hair (Kyle & Mahler, 1996).

Existing research has factored in numerous variables such as hair color, hair styles, and level of grooming into their study. Past research, stated above, found that an applicant well groomed is more likely to be hired. Being well groomed does not necessarily mean that a female is wearing makeup. Since little attention has been paid to just cosmetic usage and that previous results are inconsistent, we specifically focused this study on how cosmetics influenced a participant's perception of a job applicant.

Participants examined a resume of a female applying for either a secretary position or an elementary school position. The resume included a picture of a woman either wearing makeup or not wearing makeup. The participants then rated the applicant on various factors such as qualification, experience, work ethic, skills, agreeableness, competence, dependability, organization and responsibility. The participants also assigned the applicants a starting salary and decided whether or not they would hire the applicant. Based on past research on cosmetic usage, it is predicted that a job applicant not wearing cosmetics will be perceived as more qualified, capable, and hireable. Even though past research is inconsistent, past results seem to lean slightly more toward cosmetics having a negative effect on evaluation.

Method

Participants

Twenty-five undergraduate students from a medium sized university in the mid-Atlantic region participated in the study. Nineteen participants were female and six were male, with an average age of 20.1 years old. The students were recruited through the SONA experiment

scheduling system. They received extra credit in a psychology course at their professor's discretion.

Materials

Folders containing a picture of a woman, job description, and resume of the applicant were used in this study. The picture was one of two women with or without cosmetics on. The job descriptions were either for an elementary school teacher or a secretary. The resume attached corresponded to what job the applicant was applying for. The same resume was used for the candidate wearing makeup and not wearing makeup.

Procedure

Participants were given a folder of the job applicant. Each participant examined the photo and read the job description and resume. After reading the information, participants recorded their answers to demographic questions such as sex, grade, major, and age. Participants then completed an evaluation and rated characteristics of the applicant and determined whether or not they would hire them.

Results

The data were analyzed using a 2 (Type of Job) X 2 (With or Without Cosmetics) between-subjects Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). None of the analyses showed significant effects for either the independent variable or the interaction.