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The Influence of Physical Attractiveness on Promotion Recommendations in Male and Female Applicants

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ABSTRACT

This study reveals differing effects of physical attractiveness (PA) on male and female job applicants' promotion recommendations using a mock scenario. No significant direct effects for PA existed for promotion likelihood; however, results revealed indirect effects for PA via a positive impression for both men and women. The results support the hypothesized beneficial effects of PA for women in salary and overall rating as a potential manager with the unattractive female applicant experiencing a significant disadvantage in most ratings. In contrast, the study reveals little to negative effects of PA for the male applicants with the unattractive male applicant rated as a significantly better potential manager than the attractive male applicant. Mediating effects of positive impression associated with PA support the implicit personality theory when explaining effects of PA.

Key words: physical attractiveness, promotion, job applicants, sex differences, implicit personality theory

INTRODUCTION

Pleasant assumptions surround attractive people such as having more prestigious jobs, being more socially adept and intelligent, and happier in general with their lives. Meta-analyses support the strong effect of physical attractiveness (PA) on positive impressions and the “what is beautiful is good” phenomenon (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972, p. 285; see also Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991; Feingold, 1992; Hosoda, Stone-Romero, & Coats, 2003; Jackson, Hunter, & Hodge, 1995; Langlois et al., 2000) with the strength of the effect apparently comparable for both men and women (Eagly et al., 1991; Langlois et al., 2000). The theory proposed to account for the “what is good is beautiful” phenomenon and with most support in the Hosoda et al. meta-analysis and the Eagly et al. meta-analysis, is the implicit personality theory (Ashmore, 1981). Implicit personality theory suggests that people stereotype others on the basis of categorical assumptions related to physical characteristics, and as such, PA is subsequently linked to other positive dimensions of personality like being more socially adept, interpersonally and occupationally successful, and intelligent. Furthermore, others appear to respond more positively to physically attractive individuals with consequent positive outcomes.

This stereotype pervades evaluations of potential employees in the same way that it impacts areas of other interpersonal relations (Quereshi & Kay, 1986). Quereshi and Kay suggest that a physically attractive applicant is more likely than an unattractive applicant to be hired for a job that involves a significant amount of social interaction, hence the attribute of social competence associated with physically attractive individuals. Further, some studies reveal that PA has more influence in ratings of female applicants than male applicants (Cann, Siegfried, & Pearce, 1981; Cash & Kilcullen, 1985; Dipboye, Arvey, & Terpstra, 1977, Dipboye, Fromkin, & Wilback, 1975; Heilman & Saruwatari, 1979; Marlowe, Schneider, & Nelson, 1996; Morrow, 1990). Differences in the effects of PA for equally qualified men and women in promotion recommendations are thus the focus of this study.

A more recent meta-analysis supports the continued influence of PA on job-related outcomes in both laboratory and field settings, for both men and women, with the PA bias occurring for both human resource professionals as well as college students in laboratory settings (Hosoda et al., 2003). Heilman and associates, however, suggest that the effect for PA in men and women may be different depending on whether the occupation is male-dominated (masculine in orientation) versus female-dominated (feminine in orientation) according to a proposed lack of fit model (Heilman, 1983; Heilman & Saruwatari, 1979; Heilman & Stopeck, 1985 a,b; see also Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Cash, Gillen, & Burns, 1977). However, a study by Marlowe et al. (1996) reveals that unattractive women are the most disadvantaged on evaluations of hiring suitability and likelihood of progression toward an executive level organizational position which is contrary to the “beauty is beastly” effect proposed by Heilman and Saruwatari (1979, p. 360). Further, Jawahar and Mattsson (2005) found that a more attractive applicant regardless of sex is more likely hired regardless of whether the occupation is male-dominated or female-dominated.

As suggested by the meta-analyses, numerous individual studies reveal that PA leads to a surfeit of advantageous interview and resume evaluations, and subsequent employment opportunities including income and financial stability (Beehr & Gilmore, 1982; Judge, Hurst, & Simon, 2009; Mobius & Rosenblat, 2006; Riggio & Throckmorton, 1988; Watkins & Johnston,

2000). Damhorst and Reed (1986) found that appraisals of PA predict approximately 70% of applicant evaluations. Physically appealing people are thus hired more often than those lacking physical appeal (Bardack & McAndrew, 1985; Jawahar & Mattsson, 2005). Further, PA was the most influential factor in employment decisions in a study by Gilmore, Beehr, and Love (1986) with attractive people rated as more qualified with higher employment potential and being a better fit (appropriate personality) for the job (see also, Cash et al., 1977; Dipboye et al., 1975; Jackson, 1992; Raza & Carpenter, 1987). Others argue that PA may well be the deciding factor when applicants are equal in job qualifications (Morrow, McElroy, Stamper, & Wilson, 1990; Stone, Stone, & Dipboye, 1992) or when they all meet the required job qualifications (Cann et al., 1981) and supported by the meta-analysis conducted by Hosoda and associates (2003). Shannon and Stark's (2003) study found a significant effect for PA in their sample of male applicants and similar to the results of Mack and Rainey's (1990) study of female applicants with both studies revealing a higher likelihood of hiring the attractive male or female applicant than an equally qualified but less attractive applicant. Watkins and Johnston's study revealed that qualifications for the job are still the most crucial in employment screening with an excellent resume chosen over an average or mediocre resume regardless of the applicant's level of PA. However, attractive individuals with mediocre resumes are more frequently offered an interview than the unattractive individual. Therefore, even though excellent qualifications may be the most important criteria in the hiring process, PA appears to have a significant impact on selection when multiple applicants have similar credentials.

The majority of studies examine the effects of PA on hiring potential, with only a few examining its effects on promotion opportunities of existing employees (see Chung & Leung, 1988; Morrow, et al., 1990). Chung and Leung examined the effect of PA on promotion decisions of executives evaluating applicants with high or low work performance. They found that PA only influenced the promotion decision when the applicant's performance was mediocre and not significant when performance was of high quality. The results were similar on ratings of competence and likeability of the applicants. Their findings are comparable to those of Dipboye et al. (1977). College students were more likely to hire and give higher salaries to physically attractive applicants with less than adequate qualifications and yet, no effect found for PA when qualifications were adequate (Dipboye et al., 1977). Morrow et al. also revealed only a marginal effect of PA on personnel professionals' ratings on promotion recommendations and expectations for future success when controlling for qualifications of the applicants. Studies by Chung and Leung and by Morrow et al. found no significant differences between male and female applicants. However; Marlowe et al. (1996) found unattractive female applicants were the most disadvantaged with judgments of being less likely to receive a promotion to an executive level position than the attractive male and female applicants or the unattractive male applicant.

Purpose of the Study

We designed our study to further examine sex differences in the effects of PA on likelihood of being promoted to a high level managerial position, beginning salary level, and overall rating of the applicant as a manager. We used a between-participants design to control for contrast effects (Eagly et al. 1991) as might be found in real life selection procedures. While this type of design to control for the comparison and contrast effects might be a cost to external validity, our design controlled for demand characteristics and participants' suspicions as to the

true nature of the study associated with a within-participants design, and thus preserves its internal validity.

Considering numerous studies that provide conflicting results, we hypothesized a significant interaction between applicant sex and level of PA such that PA is beneficial to women and yet, not beneficial to men in promotion recommendation, beginning salary level, and overall rating of applicant's potential as a manager. As such, we expected that a physically attractive female applicant would more likely be promoted, receive a higher beginning salary, and be rated more positively as a potential manager than an unattractive female applicant with no effects for PA in male applicants. Last, we tested whether a positive impression via PA would subsequently mediate any effects of PA on promotion recommendation, salary level, and overall rating of the potential applicant, thus testing the implicit personality theory proposed by Hosada et al. (2003) to explain the effects of PA.

METHOD

Participants

We recruited 243 undergraduate students taking psychology courses (74 men and 169 women) from a regional comprehensive southeastern university. The majority of the students were first-year students (76%) with an average age of 18.56 years ($SD = 1.15$).

Stimulus Materials

We obtained photographs from a website¹ with permission for use in this study. The photographs were composites of numerous individuals and were validated as representing an "attractive" Caucasian man and woman and an "unattractive" Caucasian man and woman. The photos depicted the "composite" individuals from the shoulders up similar to a "mug" shot with each wearing a white shirt and portraying a neutral expression.

We wrote a job description for a General Manager or CEO of a bogus consulting firm entitled ABC Consulting Services. The description included general information as to the nature and responsibilities of the CEO and qualifications for the position. The following is the general information:

The candidate will be responsible for the day to day operations of a company that has approximately 3,000 customers and 50 employees. The candidate will be involved in decisions related to personnel management and customer relations. In addition, the candidate will be responsible for the daily financial aspects of the company, including, but not limited to accounts receivable and accounts payable.

Below the general information was a list of qualifications that included:

1. An energetic, outgoing, people oriented personality.
2. Extensive knowledge of Excel, Access, Power Point and Word a necessity.
3. Bachelor's Degree in Management, or related field, with a minimum 3.5 GPA
4. Minimum three (3) years experience in a Management position with Customer Relations and Finance experience a plus.
5. Must be willing to work long hours when necessary.

We designed a single description for a current employee named “Pat” outlining that Pat met the qualifications for the job description and promotion to the new position. We chose the name “Pat” because of its gender-neutrality, allowing use of all pictures. The following is the description of “Pat.”

Pat Smith is a male (female) who has worked the past 3 years in the customer relations department for ABC Consulting Services. He (she) has received above average performance evaluations each year. His (her) fellow workers describe him (her) as hard-working, cares about others, and aggressive in his (her) job. He (she) has a bachelors degree in management and accounting from the University of California, graduating with a 3.5 GPA. Prior to working for this company, he (she) was in a management trainee position for B & G Consulting Services and spent 1 year as manager of the small customer relations department at B & G Consulting Services.

The only difference between the two versions of the applicants’ descriptions was the use of the descriptors of male or female and male or female pronouns.

Procedure

We used a 2 X 2 factorial design that varied sex of applicant (male versus female) and attractiveness level (attractive versus unattractive). We manipulated the sex of applicant by presenting participants with the photograph of either a man or woman. We manipulated the attractiveness level by presenting participants with a photograph of an attractive man or woman or unattractive man or woman. Further, we used pictures of the job applicants to control for other nonverbal cues that could affect the results. Qualifications for the job promotion were identical for all applicants to meet the stated job qualifications in the job description.

Participants completed the study online. After consenting to participate in the study, the online survey program randomly assigned each participant to one of 4 conditions: an attractive female, an attractive male, an unattractive female, an unattractive male. Each condition provided the same job description with required qualifications followed by a photo and identical descriptions (except for use of pronouns) of an attractive/unattractive male or attractive/unattractive female current employee named “Pat Smith” applying for a promotion to the new position. Participants completed ratings of the Pat including qualifications of Pat for the promotion, likelihood of promoting Pat, how good an employee would be in this position, whether Pat was a good candidate for the job promotion, perceptions of Pat as a long term employee and a good manager, and whether Pat would be loyal and committed to the company on 10-point scales ranging from 1 = not at all to 10 = extremely. Level of beginning salary to offer Pat if promoted was rated on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 = \$35,000 to 10 = \$80,000. We combined the 5 ratings of Pat as a potential manager (how good an employee would be in this position, whether Pat was a good candidate for the job promotion, perceptions of Pat as a long term employee, a good manager, and whether Pat would be loyal and committed to the company) into an overall rating. The internal reliability for this combined measure was .83 (Cronbach alpha). Last, participants rated Pat on a list of 12 bipolar adjectives using a 10-point scale including a rating on attractiveness as a manipulation check of the attractiveness

manipulation plus: likeability, sincerity, sociability, assertiveness, trustworthiness, competence, genuine, friendliness, self-assured, ambitious, and reliable. We computed a composite “impression” variable from the average of the 11 bipolar adjectives minus the attractiveness rating with an internal reliability of .86 (Cronbach alpha).

After the participants completed the study, they were redirected to a separate online survey, not linked to their responses described above, that contained the demographic information. They included an email address to receive a copy of the final results, used for debriefing procedures.

RESULTS

Manipulation check questions supported the identical qualifications of all applicants for the job promotion and the attractiveness manipulation. There were no significant main effects or interaction with sex on ratings of qualifications for the job promotion between the different applicants supporting the standardization of the qualifications for all applicants. There was a highly significant effect for attractiveness level, $F(1, 239) = 180.48, p < .001, \eta^2 = .43$, with the attractive Pat rated significantly higher on the attractiveness rating, ($M = 7.25, SD = 1.31$), than the unattractive Pat, ($M = 4.74, SD = 1.58$). A significant main effect for attractiveness level on the composite impression variable, $F(1, 233) = 10.78, p < .01, \eta^2 = .04$, revealed a more positive composite impression of the attractive Pat, ($M = 7.12, SD = 1.18$), than the unattractive Pat, ($M = 6.66, SD = 1.00$). There were no significant effects for, or interaction with, sex found on the attractiveness rating or composite impression variable.

We conducted a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) to test for effects of applicant sex and attractiveness level on likelihood of being promoted, beginning salary level, and overall rating of Pat as a manager. An overall significant interaction occurred between applicant sex and attractiveness, $F(3, 232) = 3.09, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$. The univariate tests revealed no significant interaction or main effects for likelihood of promoting the applicant. However, a significant interaction did occur for beginning salary level, $F(1, 234) = 4.85, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$, and for overall rating of Pat, $F(1, 234) = 6.22, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$.

Follow up simple effects tests revealed a significantly higher salary awarded to the attractive female Pat ($M = 6.18, SD = 1.70$) than the unattractive female Pat ($M = 5.49, SD = 1.63$), $F(1, 119) = 5.21, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$, with no significant differences for the attractive versus unattractive male Pat, $p = .50$. Further, participants awarded the unattractive male Pat a slightly higher beginning salary ($M = 6.05, SD = 1.68$), than the unattractive female Pat, ($M = 5.49, SD = 1.63$) however, the difference only approached significance, $F(1, 116) = 3.38, p = .07, \eta^2 = .03$. No significant differences existed between the attractive male versus attractive female Pat, $p = .27$. (See Table 1 for descriptive statistics on all ratings.)

Simple effects tests also revealed that participants rated the unattractive male Pat significantly higher on the overall rating as a potential manager, ($M = 8.20, SD = 0.95$), than the attractive male Pat, ($M = 7.79, SD = 1.07$), $F(1, 118) = 5.01, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$, with no significant differences for the attractive versus unattractive female Pat, $p = .19$. Further, the participants rated the unattractive male Pat slightly higher as a potential manager, ($M = 8.20, SD = 0.95$),

than the unattractive female Pat, ($M = 7.83$, $SD = 1.08$), but the difference only approached significance, $F(1, 116) = 3.74$, $p = .06$, $\eta^2 = .03$, with no significant differences for the attractive male versus attractive female Pat, $p = .11$. (See Table 1 for descriptive statistics on all ratings.)

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations on All Ratings

Rating	Male “Pat”				Female “Pat”			
	Attractive ^a		Unattractive ^b		Attractive ^c		Unattractive ^d	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Qualifications of “Pat”	8.06	1.19	8.26	1.13	8.13	1.33	8.03	1.26
Attractiveness rating of “Pat”	7.23	1.25	4.84	1.61	7.27	1.39	4.64	1.56
Composite impression rating	7.07	1.11	6.63	1.04	7.18	1.24	6.68	0.97
Likelihood of promoting “Pat”	7.79	1.29	7.84	1.58	8.07	1.31	7.79	1.28
Beginning salary level	5.78	1.65	6.07	1.69	6.16	1.73	5.49	1.63
Overall Rating of “Pat”	7.78	1.07	8.20	0.96	8.10	1.08	7.84	1.08

Note. The attractiveness and composite impression ratings are 10-point bipolar scales. The other ratings are on 10-point scales.

^a $n = 65$, ^b $n = 57$, ^c $n = 60$, ^d $n = 61$

Intercorrelations between Variables by Sex

We conducted Pearson correlations between all variables by applicant sex to examine differences in correlations between the participants’ rating of attractiveness and likelihood of promotion, beginning salary, and overall rating of Pat for the male applicant versus the female applicant (see Table 2). We tested for significant differences between the male and female applications in correlations between rated attractiveness and each dependent variable. There was no significant difference in correlations between attractiveness and likelihood of promotion for the male Pat ($r = .05$) versus female Pat ($r = .20$). There was, however, a significant difference in correlations between attractiveness and beginning salary, $z = 2.91$, $p < .05$, with a significantly stronger relation between attractiveness and beginning salary for the female Pat ($r = .36$) than the male Pat ($r = -.03$). Further, a significant difference in correlations existed between attractiveness and overall rating of Pat as an employee, $z = 2.16$, $p < .05$, with a significantly stronger relation between attractiveness and beginning salary for the female Pat ($r = .24$) than the male Pat ($r = -.05$).

Mediation Effects of Composite Impression

We examined the mediation effects of the composite impression variable between rated attractiveness and promotion recommendation, salary level, and overall rating of the potential applicant, thus testing the implicit personality theory proposed by Hosada et al. (2003) to explain effects of PA. Since no significant differences between the male Pat and female Pat occurred for

promotion likelihood, we collapsed across applicant sex to test for mediation effects. A significant indirect effect using the Sobel test (Preacher & Hayes, 2004), $z = 2.44$, $p < .05$, (95% C.I. = .01, .09) supported the mediating effect of impression (see Figure 1 with paths represented by unstandardized regression coefficients). These results suggest that a relation between attractiveness and likelihood of promotion exists only when considering the mediating effect for impression formed from perceived attractiveness.

Table 2. Intercorrelations between Variables by Applicant Sex

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Rated Attractiveness	--	.45**	.20*	.36**	.24**
2. Composite Impression	.28**	--	.20*	.20*	.43**
3. Likelihood of Promotion	.05	.23*	--	.29**	.62**
4. Beginning Salary	-.03	.05	.35**	--	.22*
5. Overall Rating as Manager	-.05	.33**	.61**	.46**	--

Note. Pearson correlations for female applicant (n=121) on upper diagonal; Pearson correlations for male applicant (n=122) on lower diagonal.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

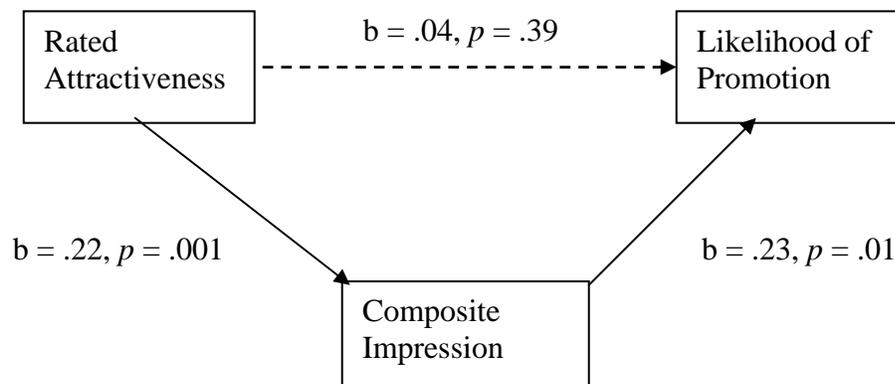


Figure 1. The relation between rated attractiveness, composite impression, and promotion likelihood. The composite impression variable was a significant mediator of the relation between rated attractiveness and likelihood of promotion.

We examined the mediating effects of the composite impression variable between rated attractiveness and beginning salary and between rated attractiveness and overall rating of Pat as a manager separately for the male versus female applicants since sex differences were found in the above MANOVA. No mediating effect for composite impression existed using the Sobel test between rated attractiveness and beginning salary for either the male Pat ($z = 0.71$, $p = .48$, (95% C.I. = -.03, .07)), or the female Pat ($z = 0.59$, $p = .56$, (95% C.I. = -.05, .10)). However, we found significant mediating effects for both the male Pat and the female Pat between rated

attractiveness and overall rating of Pat as a manager. For the male Pat, a significant indirect effect found using the Sobel test, $z = 2.48, p = .01$, (95% C.I. = .01, .11), revealed attractiveness positively related to the composite impression which also positively related to the overall rating with no significant direct relation between attractiveness and overall rating when considering the effect for impression. (See Figure 2 using unstandardized coefficients.) Similar results were found for the female Pat with a significant indirect effect using the Sobel test, $z = 3.35, p = .001$, (95% C.I. = .04, .16), with attractiveness positively related to the composite impression which also positively related to the overall rating with no significant direct relation between attractiveness and overall rating when considering the effect for impression. (See Figure 3 using unstandardized coefficients.)

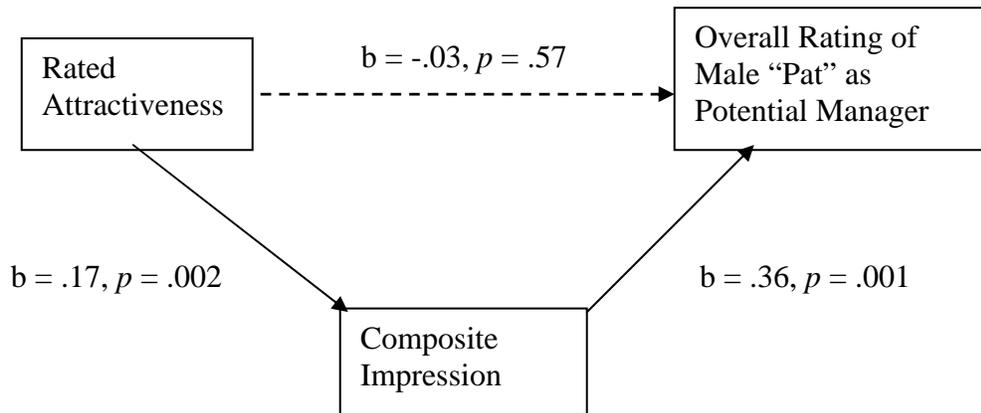


Figure 2. The relation between rated attractiveness, composite impression, and overall rating of the male applicant. The composite impression variable was a significant mediator of the relation between rated attractiveness and overall rating of the male Pat as a potential manager.

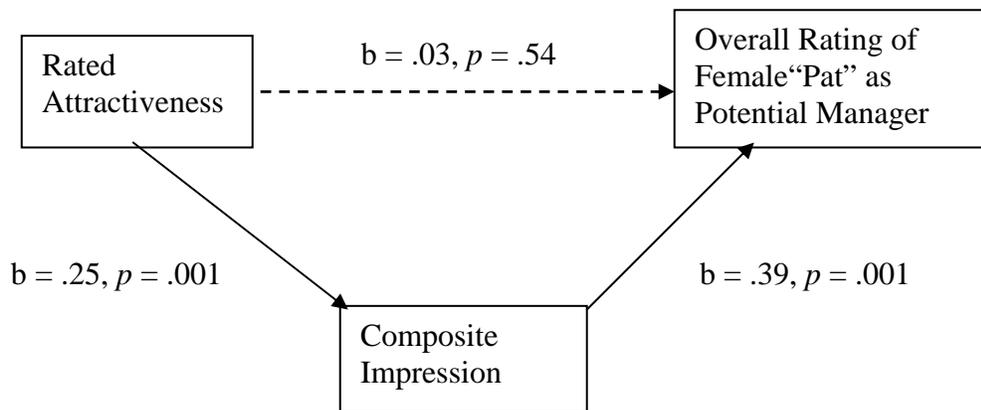


Figure 3. The relation between rated attractiveness, composite impression, and overall rating of the female applicant. The composite impression variable was a significant mediator of the relation between rated attractiveness and overall rating of the female Pat as a potential manager.

DISCUSSION

We designed our study to test the effects of PA using a mock scenario describing equally qualified male and female applicants applying for promotion to a CEO position in a rigorous between-participants design. We hypothesized that PA would be a more beneficial characteristic for female applicants than male applicants in likelihood of being promoted, receiving a higher beginning salary, and a more positive evaluation of the applicant as a potential manager. Our manipulation of PA did not support the hypothesized effects for the female applicant in likelihood of being promoted. We found no overall effects for PA or sex of applicant for the promotion measure. The mediation effects, however, supported the implicit personality theory as proposed by Hosada et al. (2003) to explain effects of PA on employment decisions. Our results suggest that attractiveness of an applicant can lead to more positive impressions thus leading to more positive promotion decisions for attractive applicants.

We did find that PA was a benefit for the female applicants on beginning salary, with the attractive female Pat awarded a significantly higher beginning salary than the unattractive female Pat with no differences in beginning salary for the attractive versus unattractive male Pat. However, participants awarded the unattractive male applicant a slightly higher salary than the unattractive female applicant again demonstrating a disadvantage to the unattractive female applicant. The correlational analyses support these results with rated attractiveness more highly and positively correlated with the beginning salary for the female applicant than existed for the male applicant. We found no mediation effects for the impression variable between rated attractiveness and beginning salary. Our results thus suggest that attractiveness in female applicants regardless of impression formed is an important attribute when awarding salary levels as opposed to little influence for male applicants.

In contrast to the above findings, participants rated the unattractive male Pat more positively as a potential manager than the attractive male Pat with no differences found between the attractive versus the unattractive female Pat. This result is contradictory to the significant differences in the correlational analyses between rated attractiveness and overall rating for the male versus female applicants. Rated attractiveness was more highly and positively correlated with the overall rating of Pat as a potential manager for the female than the male applicants. And the correlation was practically nonexistent for the male applicants. These mixed results could be due to rated attractiveness being a more sensitive measure of attractiveness than our attractiveness manipulation, as the participants actually rated the applicants' attractiveness. Furthermore, the results revealed a significant mediation effect of impression between rated attractiveness and overall rating for both the male and female applicants such that attractiveness related to the overall rating of Pat as a potential manager via the positive impression formed.

Overall, our results support the "what is beautiful is good" phenomenon (Dion et al., 1972, p. 285) related to employment decisions. The theory that bolsters this phenomenon and validates our findings is the implicit personality theory (Ashmore, 1981). The mediation effects of a positive impression associated with a highly attractive applicant for both promotion likelihood and overall rating as a potential manager provides further support for the implicit personality theory. This theory suggests that PA is often associated with other positive

characteristics, such as being socially skilled and successful on the job. Our initial analyses found that attractive applicants were rated more positively on the impression variable regardless of sex. Furthermore, the mediation effects revealed a positive relation between perceived attractiveness and likelihood of promotion, in addition to rating as a potential manager, via a positive impression associated with attractiveness. While no mediation effects were found for beginning salary, attractiveness more highly correlated with beginning salary level for the female applicant than the male applicant. As such, attractiveness may be a greater benefit for women applying for a managerial job in regards to beginning salary than for men which is contrary to Heilman (1983) lack of fit model and the “beauty is beastly” effect (Heilman & Saruwatari, 1979, p. 360) for women applying to upper level and more male dominated management positions. Furthermore, the unattractive female appears at a significant disadvantage simply based on her lack of PA since her qualifications were identical to the attractive female applicant. This finding further supports a previous study where unattractive women were at a greater disadvantage than attractive women regarding the likelihood of being hired and also promoted to a higher executive position (Marlowe et al., 1996).

Limitations and Future Research

The current study was methodologically sound and the findings primarily support previous research on PA in women, in contrast to either no effects for men or negative effects on some ratings which does not support previous positive findings for men. However, several limitations need to be addressed. First, there is a threat to external validity by using a between-participants design, rather than a within-participants design. Each participant rated only one photograph which does not generalize to real life situations where applicants evaluate applicants simultaneously and can result in comparison and contrast effects. Second, the nature of the participant pool compromised the generalizability of the results. This study used a mock scenario describing an employee seeking an executive position; however, our participants were mainly first-year undergraduates who most likely have little knowledge of the corporate world and hiring practices. Although previous research found similar results between this type of population and a professional population (Hosoda et al., 2003), replicating this study with human resource personnel or another comparable population is desirable. Third, the study lacked cultural diversity by using pictures of only Caucasian applicants. Future research should consider using other races and ethnicities since PA in ethnic minorities may be viewed differently than in the majority culture.

Future research should also consider altering the methodological design used in the present study. Using a within-participants design may produce different results since each participant rates both the attractive and unattractive applicants and engage in comparison and contrast effects. Past research reveals stronger effect sizes for within-participants designs than between-participants designs (Eagly et al., 1991; Hosoda et al., 2003). Also, future research might include studies that have descriptions of multiple job positions. Since there are jobs that are sex-typed, it would be beneficial to examine diverse career positions that range from blue-collar female-dominant to white-collar male-dominant positions. A similar study including different job descriptions could provide a better understanding of differences for applicant sex and PA existing within different workplace settings. Another direction would include providing different levels of applicant qualifications and test for an interaction between PA, applicant sex, and qualifications on promotion recommendations. Previous research reveals that having

excellent credentials remains the most crucial aspect of the hiring process (Watkins & Johnston, 2000); however, when qualifications are equal or similar as in this study, the more attractive applicant is more likely to be hired (Mack & Rainey, 1990).

Conclusions

We designed our present study to examine effects of PA on job promotions in men and women. Our hypothesized benefit of PA associated with likelihood of promotion for women was not supported. However, results for the mediation effects support the implicit personality theory (Ashmore, 1981) that suggests a positive relation between PA and more positive impressions which subsequently leads to more positive employment recommendations for both men and women. There were significant differences between the male applicants and female applicants in the relations between PA and beginning salary and overall rating as a potential manager. Stronger positive relations existed between PA and these variables for the female applicants compared to the male applicants. The unattractive female applicant appeared to be at a serious disadvantage on beginning salary and overall rating as a potential manager despite having identical qualifications as the attractive female applicant. On the other hand, PA exhibited little to no relations with ratings for the male applicants. Furthermore, contrary to expectation, the unattractive male applicant received more positive ratings as a potential manager than the attractive male applicant. Furthermore, the unattractive male applicant received more positive ratings as a potential manager than the unattractive female applicant further supporting the influence of PA for women. In sum, it is essential for human resource managers and others engaged in personnel selection to be fully aware of the biases associated with PA that can exist when hiring or promoting job applicants.

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FOOTNOTES

¹ Photographs used in the study were obtained from the website: <http://www.beautychk.com> with permission for use in this study.