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Sex and Physical Attractiveness of Raters and Applicants as Determinants of Resumé Evaluations

Robert L. Dipboye, Richard D. Arvey, and David E. Terpstra
College of Business Administration
University of Tennessee

Male and female student "interviewers," classified as either high, moderate, or low on physical attractiveness, evaluated 12 bogus job applicants for whom sex, physical attractiveness, and qualifications had been varied. A $2 \times 3 \times 2 \times 3 \times 2$ analysis of variance was computed, with the first two variables (interviewer sex and attractiveness) constituting between-group factors, and the last three variables (applicant sex, attractiveness, and qualifications) constituting repeated measures factors. Regardless of interviewer sex and attractiveness, highly qualified applicants were preferred over poorly qualified applicants, male applicants were preferred over female applicants, and attractive candidates were preferred over unattractive candidates. Discrimination in employment decisions was attributed to sex-role and physical attractiveness stereotypes.

Research on the interview has brought attention to biases that can limit the interview's validity and reliability as a technique of personnel selection. Recently, Dipboye, Fromkin, and Wiback (1975) added discrimination against physically unattractive candidates to the compendium of interviewer biases when they found that male college recruiters and business students were more willing to hire a physically attractive candidate for a supervisory position than an equally qualified unattractive candidate. Also, male candidates were preferred to female candidates, but contrary to the prediction that female attractiveness would be a more important determinant of interviewer ratings than male attractiveness, attractive candidates were preferred over unattractive candidates regardless of their sex. The present study was intended to partially replicate the Dipboye et al. study with student "interviewers" and to investigate the possible interactions of applicant sex and physical attractiveness with interviewer sex and attractiveness in determining employment evaluations.

We predicted that men and women both would be biased against unattractive and female candidates and that no differences would be found in the rating of the candidates as a function of the rater's sex. This prediction was suggested by previous findings that male and female raters show a preference for physically attractive others that is unmitigated by the sex of the rater (Byrne, London, & Reeves, 1968; Cash, Begley, McCown, & Weise, 1975; Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Miller, 1970). Also, males and females have been shown to discriminate similarly against females in salary decisions (Terborg & Ilgen, 1974), evaluations of supervisory behavior (Rosen & Jerdee, 1973), evaluations of intelligence (Lao, Upchurch, Corwin, & Grossnickle, Note 1), and performance evaluation (Goldberg, 1968; Pheterson, Kiesler, & Goldberg, 1971). A second prediction was that an applicant similar to a rater in physical attractiveness would receive more favorable evaluations than an applicant who is either more or less attractive than the rater. Thus, a highly attractive rater would give highest ratings to a highly attractive applicant, a moderately attractive rater would rate a moderately attractive applicant most favorably, and an unattractive rater would rate an unattractive applicant most favorably. The prediction that student raters would "match" in their evaluation of an applicant

Requests for reprints and for correspondence concerning this article should be sent to Robert L. Dipboye, College of Business Administration, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee 37916.

was suggested by findings of matching in dating behavior (Berscheid, Dion, Walster, & Walster, 1971; Murstein, 1972; Silverman, 1971) and by findings that interviewers are more favorably disposed toward applicants who are similar to themselves (Rand & Wexley, 1975; Wexley & Nemeroff, 1975).

In summary, we predicted that male applicants would receive higher evaluations than females and that physically attractive applicants would receive higher evaluations than unattractive applicants. Although no differences were predicted between male and female student raters in their evaluations of the applicants, a Rater Attractiveness × Applicant Attractiveness interaction was predicted in which candidates matching the rater's level of attractiveness would receive the highest ratings. In order to test these predictions, a laboratory experiment was conducted in which male and female subjects, classified as highly attractive, moderately attractive, or unattractive, evaluated male and female applicants who were also high, moderate, or low on attractiveness and either highly qualified or poorly qualified for the position.

Method

Subjects and Design

One hundred and ten Caucasian college students participated in the study in order to fulfill their introductory psychology research requirement. The design was 2 × 3 × 2 × 2 × 3 factorial, the independent variables being rater sex (male, female), rater physical attractiveness (high, moderate, and low), applicant qualifications (high and low), applicant sex (male and female), and applicant physical attractiveness (high, moderate, and low). Rater sex and attractiveness were between-group factors, and there were repeated measures on the applicant qualifications, sex, and attractivenesss factors. After discarding the data of 14 subjects to equalize cell sizes, final analyses were performed on the data of 96 subjects.

Procedure

Subjects participated in 23 experimental sessions with 5–8 subjects in each session. At the beginning of a session, an experimenter read instructions describing the study as an investigation of information processing in the selection interview. Subjects were told that their task would be first to review a job description and then to evaluate the qualifications of 12 applicants for that job on the basis of their resumés.

Measurement of rater physical attractiveness. The room in which the study was conducted contained a one-way mirror allowing unobtrusive measurement of the rater's physical attractiveness. Two graduate student experimenters, one male and the other female, independently rated each subject on facial features, body proportion, general appearance, posture, weight, and overall physical attractiveness. An attractiveness score consisted of summed ratings on these six dimensions for a subject. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient computed on the two scores obtained for each subject was .84 and indicated a high degree of interrater reliability. Subjects were classified as high, moderate, or low on attractiveness depending on whether they were in the top, middle, or lowest third on the sum of the two experimenters' attractiveness ratings.

Job description. The job for which the applicants were evaluated was that of trainee in sales management. Subjects were given a job description that stated in sex-neutral terms the duties and requirements of the position:

> The requirements of a managerial job in this firm include the ability to motivate sales personnel, the ability to make prompt and explicit decisions, clarity of thought in stressful situations, the ability to foresee management problems and initiate plans and actions promptly to ward off these problems, and the ability to communicate effectively with and ensure cooperation with other parts of the company and the public.

Manipulation of applicant sex and qualifications. Each subject evaluated 12 applicants. In order to add realism to the task, each applicant's qualifications were described on a standard resumé form used by students interviewing at the Placement Office of the University of Tennessee. The resumés contained a variety of information, including extracurricular activities, a brief statement of career goals, hobbies, and percentage of college expenses earned. The qualifications of the candidates were manipulated by varying the grade point average and past work experience. In six of the resumés, the applicants were depicted as highly qualified for the job as revealed by a good grade point average (3.45–3.81) and past work experience in sales. The six low-qualifications resumés displayed low grade point averages (2.24–2.42) and no past work in sales. Sex of the candidates was manipulated by depicting half or 6 of the applicants as male and the other half as female. All other information on the resumés besides sex, grade point, and work experience depicted the 12 candidates as equally qualified for the job.

Manipulation of applicant attractiveness. The physical attractiveness of the applicants was manipulated by attaching to the resumés glossy yearbook pictures of Caucasian students found in pilot research to be high, moderate, or low on attractiveness. A minimum of 12 pictures was needed, 2 for each of the 6 possible combinations of applicant sex and attractiveness. Using the same pictures for each subject

Table 1
Analysis of Variance of Hiring and Salary Ratings

Source	*df*	*F* Hire	*F* Salary
Rater sex (A)	1	.01	3.66
Rater attractiveness (B)	2	.31	.15
A × B	2	.96	1.28
Error	90		
Applicant qualifications (C)	1	563.93**	163.80**
Error	90		
Applicant sex (D)	1	20.44**	31.19**
Error	90		
Applicant attractiveness (E)	2	24.80**	10.60**
Error	180		
A × C	1	.01	.28
B × C	2	.08	.78
A × B × C	2	1.14	.50
Error	90		
A × D	1	.77	.31
B × D	2	.19	2.03
A × B × D	2	.41	.39
Error	90		
A × E	2	.12	1.30
B × E	4	.17	.95
A × B × E	4	.35	.90
Error	180		
C × D	1	.51	1.71
A × C × D	1	1.74	4.14*
B × C × D	2	.57	.25
A × B × C × D	2	.41	.02
Error	90		
C × E	2	19.64*	7.04**
A × C × E	2	.24	1.15
B × C × E	4	.64	.76
A × B × C × E	4	.48	1.44
Error	180		
D × E	2	5.02*	1.16
A × D × E	2	.39	1.47
B × D × E	4	.72	.19
A × B × D × E	4	.67	.42
Error	180		
C × D × E	2	.06	.76
A × C × D × E	2	.11	1.65
B × C × D × E	4	.24	1.87
A × B × C × D × E	4	.51	1.48
Error	180		

* $p < .05$.
** $p < .001$.

and each condition could have confounded the manipulations with specific characteristics of individual pictures. To provide stimulus sampling and to avoid this confound, 4 pictures were used for each of the 6 applicant sex–attractiveness conditions, with 2 of the 4 pictures selected on a random basis for a given subject. For example, 2 of 4 highly attractive male pictures were selected at random for a given subject, and these two pictures were assigned at random to low- and high-qualifications resumés. The same procedure was followed for the 5 remaining sex–attractiveness combinations. The 12 resumés were presented to a subject in a randomly determined order.

Dependent measures. After reviewing a resumé, subjects evaluated the applicant on two dependent measures. First, they indicated their willingness to hire the applicant on a 7-point Likert scale, the end points being "definitely would not recommend hiring" (1) and "definitely would recommend hiring" (7). This item measured what Terborg and Ilgen (1975) would refer to as entry discrimination. A second item measured what the same authors would refer to as treatment discrimination. Subjects were asked to assume that they had hired the applicant and to state the starting salary they would provide. The alternatives ranged from \$8,000–\$8,999 (1) to \$20,000–\$21,999 (7). After subjects had rated all resumés on the main dependent measures, they were asked to choose the *one* applicant they would hire if they had to choose only one. Finally, they were asked to rate each of the 12 applicants for the job on a series of bipolar adjectives.

Results

Manipulation Checks

Two of the bipolar adjectives were physically unattractive (1)–physically attractive (7) and unqualified (1)–qualified (7). These items allowed a check on the experimental manipulations of attractiveness and qualifications. The means for the applicants high, moderate, and low on attractiveness on the

Table 2
Hiring and Salary Ratings as a Function of Applicant Sex, Qualifications, and Attractiveness

Qualifications and level of attractiveness	Male		Female	
	Hire	Salary	Hire	Salary
Low qualifications				
Low	3.30	1.61	2.91	1.50
Moderate	3.70	1.77	3.64	1.70
High	4.13	1.98	3.76	1.74
High qualifications				
Low	5.93	2.75	5.55	2.50
Moderate	5.80	2.67	5.81	2.51
High	6.05	2.79	5.79	2.58

Note. $N = 96$.

attractiveness adjective were, respectively, 5.00, 3.39, and 2.22, $F(2, 180) = 388.99$, $p < .001$. The means on the qualifications adjectives for the low- and high-qualifications groups, respectively, were 3.70 and 5.74, $F(1, 90) = 338.90$, $p < .001$. Thus, both the manipulations of qualifications and attractiveness were perceived correctly.

Analysis of Hire Ratings

A $2 \times 3 \times 2 \times 2 \times 3$ analysis of variance was performed on subject ratings of willingness to hire the candidates and is summarized in Table 1. Table 2 gives the relevant means based on this analysis. The findings of Dipboye et al. (1975) were replicated, with main effects found for applicant sex, physical attractiveness, and qualifications. Subjects were more willing to recommend hiring a candidate with high qualifications ($M = 5.82$) than a candidate with low qualifications ($M = 3.57$), $F(1, 90) = 563.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .50$; they were more willing to hire a male ($M = 4.82$) than a female ($M = 4.58$), $F(1, 90) = 20.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .006$; and they were more willing to hire a highly attractive candidate ($M = 4.93$) and a moderately attractive candidate ($M = 4.74$) than an unattractive candidate ($M = 4.42$), $F(2, 180) = 24.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.18$.

Two interaction effects were significant, and Newman-Keuls analyses were performed to provide an interpretation. A significant Applicant Sex × Applicant Attractiveness interaction, $F(2, 180) = 5.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .002$, showed that the attractive male was rated significantly higher ($M = 5.09$) than the attractive female applicant ($M = 4.78$; $p < .05$) and that the unattractive male was rated higher ($M = 4.61$) than the unattractive female ($M = 4.23$; $p < .05$). However, the ratings given to moderately attractive male ($M = 4.75$) and female ($M = 4.72$) applicants did not significantly differ. An Applicant Qualifications × Applicant Attractiveness interaction, $F(2/180) = 19.64$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .008$, showed that the effects of physical attractiveness were more pronounced if the candidate had low qualifications ($Ms = 3.10$, 3.60, and 3.94 for the low-, moderate-, and high-attractiveness candidates, respectively) than if the candidate had high qualifications ($Ms = 5.74$, 5.80, and 5.92 for the low-, moderate-, and high-attractiveness groups, respectively). A Newman-Keuls analysis performed on the means of the interaction indicated that the only nonsignificant differences were between the moderate- and low-attractiveness conditions of the low-qualifications candidates.

Analysis of Salary Ratings

The same main effects were found for salary decisions as were found for hiring ratings (see Tables 1 and 2). Higher salaries were given to a highly qualified candidate ($M = 2.63$) than to a poorly qualified candidate ($M = 1.72$), $F(1, 90) = 163.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .168$; to a male ($M = 2.26$) than to a female ($M = 2.09$), $F(1, 90) = 31.19$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .006$; and to a highly attractive candidate ($M = 2.27$) and moderately attractive candidate ($M = 2.16$) than to an unattractive candidate ($M = 2.09$), $F(2, 180) = 10.6$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .004$. Two interactions were found in the analysis of salary decisions and Newman-Keuls analyses were performed on each. An Applicant Qualifications × Applicant Attractiveness interaction, $F(2, 180) = 7.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .002$, revealed significant differences among physical attractiveness levels for low qualification candidates ($Ms = 1.56$, 1.73, and 1.86, for the low-, moderate-, and high-attractiveness candidates, respectively) but nonsignificant differences for the high qualification candidates ($Ms = 2.63$, 2.59, and 2.69 for the low, moderate-, and high-attractiveness candidates, respectively). A significant Applicant Qualifications × Applicant Sex × Rater Sex interaction, $F(1, 90) = 4.14$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .001$, revealed that male candidates were given higher salaries than female candidates in every condition with the exception of one. When the candidate had low qualifications and the rater was male, the difference in salary given to the male and to the female was nonsignificant.

Analysis of Hiring Choices

Although significant main effects for sex and physical attractiveness were found in the

Table 3
Frequencies and Percentages of Raters Choosing Each of the 12 Applicants

Applicant	Male		Female		Total	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%
HMA	21	44	13	27	34	35
HMN	7	15	7	15	14	15
HMU	6	13	5	10	11	11
HFA	4	8	3	6	7	7
HFN	3	6	4	8	7	7
HFU	5	10	12	25	17	18
LMA	2	4	1	2	3	3
LMN	0	0	3	6	3	3
LMU	0	0	0	0	0	0
LFA	0	0	0	0	0	0
LFN	0	0	0	0	0	0
LMU	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	48	100	48	100	96	100

Note. H = high qualifications and L = low qualifications; M = male and F = female; A = high attractiveness, N = moderate attractiveness, and U = low attractiveness.

analysis of variance, the small eta-square values and the small differences between means raise doubts as to whether or not subjects would, in reality, discriminate against women and those perceived as unattractive to any serious extent. To provide another test of the predictions, subjects were asked to choose the *one* candidate they would hire if there was only one opening to be filled.

In Table 3, the frequencies and percentages of subjects choosing each of the 12 candidates have been summarized. The most frequently chosen applicant was the highly qualified, attractive male, who was selected by 35% of the subjects. If one assumes that the grade point and job experience information constituted the only bona fide job qualifications and that subjects did not discriminate on the basis of applicant sex and attractiveness, then the six highly qualified applicants should have been chosen with equal frequency. However, the number of male and female raters choosing a highly qualified male candidate ($f = 59$) was significantly greater than the number choosing a highly qualified female candidate ($f = 31$), $\chi^2(1) = 8.71$, $p < .05$. Also, the frequencies with which highly qualified, attractive ($f = 41$), moderately attractive ($f = 21$), and unattractive ($f = 28$) candidates were chosen differed significantly from frequencies expected on the basis of chance ($f = 30$), $\chi^2(2) = 6.86$, $p < .05$. Thus, it appears that subjects discriminated in their choice of a candidate against women and those perceived as unattractive. Male raters did not differ from female raters in either the frequency with which they chose a highly qualified male over a highly qualified female, $\chi^2(1) = 2.20$, *ns*, or in the frequency with which they chose a highly attractive over moderately attractive and unattractive candidates, $\chi^2(2) = 3.37$, *ns*.

Rater attractiveness had no effect on the selection of a candidate. The frequencies with which a highly attractive, moderately attractive, and unattractive candidate was chosen were 17, 7, and 8, respectively, for the unattractive raters; 15, 10, and 7, respectively, for the moderately attractive raters; and 13, 7, and 12, respectively, for the highly attractive raters. Choice of a candidate on the basis of attractiveness did not differ as a function of rater attractiveness, $\chi^2(4) = 4.09$, *ns*. Thus, the matching hypothesis was confirmed in neither the analysis of variance of ratings nor the analysis of hiring choices.

Analysis of Bipolar Adjective Ratings

An analysis that tested differences between the ratings of male and female applicants on the bipolar adjectives revealed that subjects rated the candidates in a manner consistent

Table 4
Comparisons of Male and Female Applicants on the Bipolar Adjectives

Bipolar adjective	Male	Female	*F*
Competent–incompetent	2.95	3.03	3.62
Unintelligent–intelligent	5.29	5.27	.57
Unfriendly–friendly	4.87	5.17	30.78**
Experienced–inexperienced	3.65	3.95	21.91**
Indecisive–decisive	4.84	4.56	27.25**
Uninformed–informed	4.95	4.71	27.63**
Competitive–noncompetitive	3.15	3.45	22.88**
Motivated–unmotivated	3.03	3.20	8.43**
Logical–illogical	3.23	3.37	5.53*
Cold–warm	3.15	3.45	22.88**
Emotional–unemotional	3.20	3.03	8.43**
Assertive–unassertive	4.59	4.86	19.81**

Note. The first adjective in each pair was rated 1 and the second, 7.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

with sex stereotypes. Female applicants, relative to the male applicants, were rated as less experienced, decisive, informed, competitive, motivated, logical, and assertive. On the other hand, females were rated as friendlier, warmer, and more emotional than the males. Males and females were rated as equally competent and intelligent. The mean ratings of male and female candidates are reported in Table 4.

Similar to the differences found for applicant sex, subjects perceived differences among the attractiveness groups on the bipolar adjectives such that highly attractive candidates were perceived as possessing more favorable characteristics on all the adjectives listed in Table 3 with the exception of the intelligent–unintelligent bipolar adjective. No differences were found on this item.[1]

Discussion

From the findings of the present study as well as the Dipboye et al. (1975) study, one may conclude that the candidate perceived as most qualified for a managerial position was not only highly qualified with respect to scholastic record and work experience but also was physically attractive and male. However, bias against female applicants on the willingness to hire ratings was limited to situations in which the applicants were highly attractive and unattractive and was less pronounced when the applicants were moderately attractive. Also, bias against those perceived as unattractive was more pronounced when the candidates had low qualifications than when candidates had high qualifications, a finding that is similar to results reported by Landy and Sigall (1974). Despite the evidence of bias, our study and past research (Carlson, 1967; Dipboye et al., 1975; Hamner, Kim, Baird, & Bigoness, 1974) indicate that sex and physical appearance account for only trivial proportions of rating variance. However, discrimination against females and those perceived as unattractive in the present experiment seemed to have emerged more clearly than indicated in the ratings when subjects chose the *one* candidate they would hire. A plausible explanation for the treatment and entry discrimination was that subjects possessed sex and attractiveness stereotypes. In support of such a position and consistent with sex-role research (Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, & Vogel, 1970; Schein, 1973) and physical attractiveness research (Cash et al., 1975; Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Miller, 1970), subjects attributed more favorable traits to applicants who were highly attractive than to applicants who were unattractive, and they attributed more favorable traits to male applicants than to female applicants.

Neither interviewer sex nor physical attractiveness were associated with the ratings or choice of candidates. Women in this study were as biased against women and those perceived as unattractive as were men, which suggests that placing more women in positions in which they conduct the interviews and make the employment decisions may not eliminate bias in the employment process. The elimination of bias may require the modification of the stereotypes that both men and women possess (Schein, 1973, 1975). Just as women were willing to discriminate against other women, people who were judged as unattractive on the basis of white American norms discriminated against other unattractive persons and preferred a physically attractive applicant. A situation in which the predicted matching effect might occur would be one in which the interviewer anticipated future interaction with the interviewee, a situation in which an attractive candidate might pose a potential threat to the interviewer's self-esteem (Huston, 1973).

There are several cautions that should be observed in interpreting the data of the present study. First, undergraduate college students were used in order to compare the employment decisions of males and females, a comparison that is not easily made given the scarcity of professional female interviewers and recruiters. Although past research supports the use of college students as interviewers (Bernstein, Hakel, & Harlan, 1975; Dipboye et al., 1975), caution must still be used in generalizing to professional interviewers. A second limitation is that bias against female and unattractive applicants for managerial

[1] Comparisons of attractiveness groups on the bipolar adjectives will be made available on request from the first author.

positions may not generalize to other types of positions. Indeed, Cohen and Bunker (1975) found that interviewers were biased against male applicants for traditionally female roles just as they were biased against female applicants for traditionally male roles. Similar research is needed to determine whether bias against physically unattractive persons occurs across a variety of positions or whether it is specific to certain types of positions, such as those that are visible and require social interaction. A third caution is that these findings may be more relevant to the preinterview phase, in which the resumé and other summarized applicant characteristics are evaluated, than to the interview itself. For instance, sex and attractiveness may account for even less rating variance in a realistic interview setting where the interviewer may observe a variety of interviewee characteristics in addition to the limited information contained on a resumé. Despite these limitations, it seems reasonable to conclude that sex and physical attractiveness biases exist, influence simulated employment judgments, and are deserving of study by industrial and organizational psychologists.

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