

Effects of Physical Attractiveness and Gender Bias on Hiring Decisions

Jane M. Doe  
~~Natalie J. Feldhake~~

Minnesota State University Moorhead

## Abstract

The effects of physical attractiveness (unattractive and attractive individuals) and gender bias (match vs. mismatch) on employment will be examined. Forty college students (18 + years old) will be given a series of eight photos, resumes, job descriptions and a questionnaire. Participants will be asked to evaluate the hireability of that applicant based on the material given. Each participant will rate the hireability of the applicant using two questions based on a seven-point scale. It is predicted physically attractive individuals will be given the *What is Beautiful is Good* benefit compared to unattractive applicants. However, the applicants' match/ mismatch with the jobs gender stereotypes will be the leading factor in an applicant's hireability for the job regardless of attractiveness.

little information on college student's judging the hireability of individuals their age. This proposed study would focus on college-age students judging the hireability of their supposed peers.

The purpose of this present study is to examine the effects of physical attractiveness and gender bias interaction on adults' ratings of hireability. The present study will focus on the mismatch of gender-stereotyped jobs based on gender and the effect that physical attractiveness can play on the unconscious decision-making process of employers. There are few studies using the population of college-age students, consequently, this study will be using that population. Researchers will be varying physically attractiveness of the applicant and also a match or mismatch based on the gender of the applicant and the type of job they are applying for. Any stimulus that has a mismatch with applicant's gender and job type will be looking for an unconscious gender stereotype within jobs. Participants will make an evaluation on the hireability of the applicant based on two questions using a seven-point scale. There is a prediction that gender will affect the hireability of the applicant depending on the job that they are applying for. Specifically, participants will give attractive job applicants the *What is Beautiful is Good* benefit compared to unattractive job applicants. Overall, there will be a strong preference for the match over the mismatch applicant. This means that Role Congruity Theory will be the leading bias in an applicant's hireability.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Forty college students (18+ years old) attending Minnesota State University Moorhead will be used as participants. Participants will volunteer to participate in the study; the

signup sheet is located on the third floor of Bridges Hall. Participants will be given extra credit in the form of a blue card for the desired class of their choice by volunteering to participate in the study. All participants will be treated accordingly to the ethical principles of the American Psychological Association (APA).

### **Design**

This study can be considered a 2 (attractiveness of the individual) x 2 (job - gender stereotype match) within subjects factorial design because there are two independent variables. The physical attractiveness of the individual has two levels (attractive or unattractive) and the job with gender stereotype match has two levels (match or mismatch). The dependent measures are the evaluation of the hireability and strength of the applicants made by participants on a seven-point scale. (I will use two 2 x 2 within subjects factorial ANOVA to run tests on both dependent variables (hireability and application strength). )

move to end  
of Results

### **Materials**

Eight color images (see Appendix A) will be used for all the conditions. The eight images will be photocopied on an 8-½ inch x 11-inch paper. Appendix A demonstrates two sets of an attractive- female, an attractive- male, an unattractive- female, and an unattractive- male making eight photos overall. The photos were chosen from the Chicago Face Database. The database uses an attractiveness rating scale from 1 – 5. Attractive individuals were chosen on ratings 3.5 – 5, while unattractive individuals were chosen on ratings less than 1 – 3. Participants will view all eight images. The particular image and job – stereotype pairing will be counterbalanced across conditions.

Two different job titles were chosen to represent male and female stereotyped jobs: (a) nurse and (b) police officer. These two job titles were used in previous research to distinguish between stereotyped “female” jobs and stereotyped “male” jobs (Ng & Wiesner, 2007). The job descriptions of these two titles were taken from O\*NET OnLine (<https://www.onetonline.org/>). See Appendix C for job descriptions.

The material that remains constant throughout the experiment is the résumé of the applicant. All resumes will contain and applicants experience, education and skills but specific details will vary. For example, all nursing applicants will have the same degree, but the school they received it from will vary. There will be a series of eight resumes for the eight different applicants: 1) attractive male police officer match 2) unattractive male police officer match 3) attractive male nurse mismatch 4) unattractive male nurse mismatch 5) attractive female nurse match 6) unattractive female nurse match 7) attractive female police officer mismatch 8) unattractive female police officer mismatch. See Appendix B for an example police and nurse résumé.

Two questions from Watkins and Johnston (2000) will be used to evaluate the hireability of the applicant. These questions will ask the participants to rate the applicant based on the strength of their qualifications and materials and how likely they are to hire this applicant. Participants will be instructed to rate each applicant independently from the other. Comparisons with other applicants will be discouraged. Some distracting questions will be asked about attractiveness, trustworthiness, and how responsible the applicant seems to be (See Appendix D).

## **Procedure**

Forty participants at Minnesota State University Moorhead will be invited to participate in a study examining the suitability of applicants for a particular job. The session will take place

in a room in Bridges Hall on campus. Participants will be presented with a consent form at the beginning of the session. Each participant will be given a series of eight envelopes with a photograph, job description, résumé, and hiring questionnaire. Participants will complete a separate questionnaire with each envelope. Participants will individually view and rate one male and female applicant for each attractiveness-match combination (i.e. attractive-match, attractive-mismatch, unattractive-match, unattractive-mismatch).

Participants will be informed that all material they will evaluate is fictitious. They will be asked to imagine themselves as the hiring professional for each job description and their task is to decide strength of the applicant for the job and the hireability of the applicant for the job. The task requires them to review the job description and evaluate the applicant based on the résumé and photograph. Participants will then rank each applicant on a seven-point scale on five different questions (See appendix D).

At the end of the session, the participant will be given a demographic questionnaire, will be debriefed and thanked for their participation. The demographic questionnaire will ask age and the class level they currently are in school. This information will make up the basic components of my study. They will be given extra credit in the form of a blue card. The entire session will last approximately 15 minutes.

### **Results**

The questionnaire, using questions by Watkins and Johnston, will be rated on a seven-point scale in each series of the independent variables. For example, participants will rate the applicant on a scale from 1 – 7, with one being poor and seven being excellent. Scores on each of the five questions will be analyzed. The descriptive statistics, mean and standard deviation, will be focused on the interaction of factors A x B.

*Appendix A: image examples of attractive/ unattractive females and males*



Attractive Female



Attractive Male



Unattractive Female



Unattractive Male



Attractive Female



Attractive Male



Unattractive Female



Unattractive Male

*Appendix B: résumé examples for police and nurse applicant***Individual #1****Objective**

Self-motivated soon-to-graduate student seeking a position as a Police Officer post graduation. Possess current firearms safety certification solid people skills and a strong knowledge of the use of surveillance equipment and related computer programs and applications. Prepared to apply natural leadership communication and observation skills to better serve the public.

**Experience****Criminal Justice Externship****Summer 2015**

Completed 300 hours of training based internship

- Assisted the senior officer in patrolling the assigned area during assigned hours
- Generated daily reports based on day's duties and events
- Assisted in public awareness of crime protection campaigns

**Volunteer Security Officer****Summer 2014**

- Ensured young participants' adherence to the facility's laws and procedure
- Conducted rounds in the facility to ensure the prevalence of peace
- Built trust in young people using the facility and educated them regarding crime prevention

**Education****Community College****2015 - 2017**

AAS degree in Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice

**Related Coursework**

- Introduction to Criminal Justice
- Corrections: Policies and Procedures
- Crime Prevention Techniques
- Criminal Law and Judicial Process
- Juvenile Justice and Delinquency

**Skills**

- Computer proficiency
- Listening and comprehension
- Observation and detection
- Proactive safety
- English and Spanish fluency
- Physical fitness



## Individual #2

### Objective

Nursing RN recent graduate seeking to use earned skills and knowledge to assist your hospital in a nursing role. Proven to ably handle any medical emergency or situation, with the requisite skill-set to perform under pressure. Excellent interpersonal skills, and a dedicated worker with a sense of purpose. Possess a BS in Nursing.

### Experience

#### Medical Center

2015 - Present

Preceptorship Nurse

- Monitored five assigned patients, updating information on vital signs and progress of treatment.
- Documented data related to patients' care including assessment results, interventions, medications, patient responses, or treatment changes.
- Assessed condition of patients, ordering and evaluating diagnostic tests as needed.

#### Standard Hospital

2014 - 2015

Clinical Practicum

- Collaborated with other healthcare professionals to plan, manage, and assess patient treatments in the acute care unit with a bed capacity of 32 patients.
- Administered blood product transfusions or intravenous infusions, monitoring patients for adverse reactions.
- Performed emergency medical procedures, such as basic cardiac life support (BLS), advanced cardiac life support (ACLS), and other condition stabilizing interventions.
- Discussed illnesses and treatments with patients and family members in a supportive manner.

### Education

#### Community College

May 2015

Bachelor of Science in Nursing

#### Related Coursework

- Observational Methods
- Principles of Teaching Applied to Nursing
- Pharmaceuticals Oncology
- Qualitative Analysis

### Licensures & Certifications

- Registered Nurse: State Board of Nursing, License #00000
- Basic Life Support (BLS) certified by American Heart Association

### Skills

- Communication
- Prioritizing
- Multitasking
- Team Work
- Organizational Skills
- Dependability

*Appendix C: job descriptions of Nurse and Police taken from O\*Net Online***Registered Nurse**

Assess patient health problems and needs, develop and implement nursing care plans, and maintain medical records. Administer nursing care to ill, injured, convalescent, or disabled patients. May advise patients on health maintenance and disease prevention or provide case management. Licensing or registration required.

**Police Patrol Officer**

Maintain order and protect life and property by enforcing local, tribal, State, or Federal laws and ordinances. Perform a combination of the following duties: patrol a specific area, direct traffic; issue traffic commands; investigate accidents; apprehend and arrest suspects, or serve legal processes of courts.

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study**  
**Psychology Department, Minnesota State University Moorhead**  
**Hiring Decisions**

You are invited to participate in a study of hireability and applicant strength being conducted by Dr. Christine Malone, Professor of Psychology at MSUM, with the help of student assistant [REDACTED]

**Purpose of the study:** We hope to learn what types of information influence hireability and strength of an applicant applying for a job. We will address these questions by presenting you with a series of fictional applicants and asking you to make a judgment about each. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are an MSUM psychology student.

**What you will do in this study:** If you decide to participate, you will be asked to view a series of job applicants and then make hiring decisions about them by completing a five-question questionnaire. A debriefing session in which the particulars of the study are explained will be held immediately following the experiment. The experiment will be carried out in the MSUM Psychology Department in Bridges Hall.

**Time required:** The entire experiment will last about 15 minutes.

**Risks:** There are no known risks or discomforts associated with participation in this study.

**Benefits:** This study is designed to further our knowledge of the variables that have an impact on hiring decisions. Your participation as an observer will provide you with first-hand experience in research studies examining hiring decisions. In addition, you will receive proof of your participation, which may be submitted for extra credit in a psychology course (if allowed by the instructor).

**Confidentiality:** The responses in this study are being collected for research purposes only. Records of your responses will be stored in the offices or laboratories of the investigator in a locked filing cabinet, and will be made available only to researchers directly involved in the study. Response sheets are coded anonymously, and you will not be personally identified in any report or publication resulting from this study.

**Participation and withdrawal:** Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your future relationships with the MSUM Psychology department. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue your participation at any time without prejudice.

**Contact:** Please feel free to ask questions now or at any time during the study. If you have additional questions about the experiment, you can contact Dr. Christine Malone in the Psychology Department, office: Br 360 G, phone: (218) 477-2804, and email: [malonech@mnstate.edu](mailto:malonech@mnstate.edu).

**Whom to contact about your rights in this experiment:** You may contact Dr. Lisa Karch, Chair of MSUM Institutional Review Board at [lisa.karch@mnstate.edu](mailto:lisa.karch@mnstate.edu) or (218) 477-2699. You may also contact the Psychology Departmental Review Committee Co-Chair, Dr. Rochelle Bergstrom, [bergstro@mnstate.edu](mailto:bergstro@mnstate.edu), (218) 477-4084.

**Agreement:** The purpose and nature of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty.

**Upon your request, you will be provided with a copy of the signed consent form to take with you.**

**In signing this agreement, I also affirm that I am at least 18 years of age or older.**

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

---

Signature of Investigator

---

Date

**Debriefing for Hiring Decisions  
Minnesota State University Moorhead  
Department of Psychology**

This study is concerned with the variables that influence hiring decisions of an applicant. Previous studies have found that both physical attractiveness and gender biases influence how strong and qualified an applicant is perceived to be for a position. For example, previous literature postulates a trend that unattractive applicants are evaluated less favorably than attractive applicants during the interview phase. They also found that gender stereotypes influence personnel selection because of the perceived characteristics, objectives and expectations of male and female applicants. Many studies found that despite the attractiveness of a female applicant, the male applicant was more likely to be hired in a stereotypical male job. For example, Heilman and Saruwatari (1979) found attractive females applying for male stereotyped jobs or managerial jobs were seen as less fit than male applicants of any attractiveness level applying for the same job.

In this study, participants were asked to evaluate a series of eight envelopes that contained a photograph, job description, résumé, and hiring questionnaire. All eight conditions will include: 1) attractive male police officer match 2) unattractive male police officer match 3) attractive male nurse mismatch 4) unattractive male nurse mismatch 5) attractive female nurse match 6) unattractive female nurse match 7) attractive female police officer mismatch 8) unattractive female police officer mismatch. Then participants were asked to rank each applicant on a seven-point scale on five different questions. Our aim is to determine if the combination of physical attractiveness and gender biases have an effect on perceived hiring decisions of an applicant.

The hiring decisions questionnaire required participants to indicate their rankings of the applicant on five different questions. Three of the questions were used as distractions, while the other two were used to evaluate the (a) the strength of the applicant for the job given and (b) how likely the participant, as the hiring manager, would offer the applicant the job.

Understanding the factors that affect hiring decisions made by hiring managers may be relevant in occupational settings. For example, if hiring managers are educated regarding the biases and judgments they may have during the interview phase of hiring, they will be aware of those factors and thus use measures to eliminate them for fair and just hiring practice.

The results of this study will be available in early December 2018 and will be posted on the bulletin board across from the Psychology Department office (Bridges Hall, room 360).

**Whom to contact for more information:**

If you have questions about this study, or if you would like to receive a summary report of this research when it is completed, please contact Dr. Christine Malone in Bridges Hall, room 360G (phone 218-477-2804).

**Whom to contact about your rights in this experiment:**

Dr. Rochelle Bergstrom, [bergstro@mnstate.edu](mailto:bergstro@mnstate.edu), phone 218-477-4084, Co-Chair of the Psychology Departmental Review Committee or else Dr. Lisa Karch, [lisa.karch@mnstate.edu](mailto:lisa.karch@mnstate.edu), phone 218-477-2699, Chair of MSUM Institutional Review Board.

**If you feel that you are experiencing adverse consequences from this study:** Adverse consequences are not expected, but if concerns arise as a result of participating in this experiment, please contact the Hendrix Counseling Center at 218-477-2211.

**If you would like to learn more about this topic:**

Heilman, M. E., & Saruwatari, L. R. (1979). When beauty is beastly: The effects of appearance and sex on evaluations of job applicants for managerial and nonmanagerial jobs. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 23(3), 360-372. doi:10.1016/0030-5073(79)90003-5

**Thank you for your participation!**