

# Study on the relationship between skin tone and hiring decisions



While pale skin in Asia culture has been considered as beauty standard and reflected a high-class social status, tanned skin in the Western culture conversely demonstrated wealthiness and perceived as attractive. For instance, famous celebrities and actors who had tanned skin were believed to have good personalities and status (Etcoff, 1999; Keesling & Friedman, 1987). Physical attractiveness in this current study is defined as individuals having brown or bronzed skin color, along with positive characteristic features such as brilliance, competence and sociability. Past studies have supported the theory that tanned skin is equivalent to attractiveness, which also lead to a positive perception of personal quality (Dion, Bercheid, & Walster, 1972). Moreover, Grant and colleagues (1990) also believed that individuals with tanned skin has been seen as more amiable, healthier, and sportier in comparison to those non-tanned individuals. The majority of the past researches focused on how skin color associated with personal traits. Nonetheless, these studies appear to be lack of investigation on the importance of tanned skin as well as attractiveness in a hiring setting. Thus, it motivated Gillen and Bernstein (2015) to conduct this current research on how physical attractiveness including tanned skin is related to perception of attractiveness and its impact on hiring decision.

The research question of this current study is to examine whether or not job hiring decisions are affected by the tan level among applicants. While the independent variable in this experiment are the candidates' tanness level and candidates' gender, the dependent variable conversely contains variety of employment hiring judgement, level of attractiveness, recommendation ranks, and positiveness. The experimenters firstly hypothesized that tanmale

applicants would have higher chance to be hired and recommended by employers compared to non-tan male applicants. The second hypothesis that experimenters provided was tan female candidates would be evaluated as more positive and attractive, which also meant that they would be more likely to get hired than non-tan female candidates.

There are two studies were conducted to support the current research. The first study consisted of 121 participants (46 females, 75 males) who all came from the United States. Data was collected via Amazon's Mechanical Turk, and participation was chosen by self-selected. Participants were informed about an opening position for a college counseling and also provided with a male candidate's resume. All participants were randomly given the same resume with the photo of the candidate. However, the photo of the male candidate was precisely classified as tanned and non-tanned version by using Adobe Photoshop CS5 to form tanning effects. Participants were then be asked to rate the candidate whether or not they would employ that specific individual and suggest the candidate for the opening position. Additionally, the dependent variable as hiring judgement was measured by the decision yes or no, while the recommendation rank of participants was measured on a 1-10 scale ( 1 = not at all, 10 = very strongly). On the other hand, the independent variable was measured by two simple words which are tanned and non-tanned. Finally, participants were asked to provide their basic demographic information. In addition, the second study consisted of 268 participants (111 females, 157 males). Data as well was collected through the online platform Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants were also chosen by self-selected. Regards to the procedure, participants were first

provided a photo of a female and then inquired to evaluate her physical appearance. Following by the evaluation, participants were once again asked to rate her attractiveness. Photos of the female were also randomly assigned to participants without being aware of tanned or non-tanned version.

Afterwards, participants decided whether or not the female candidate would be hired for an opening nursing spot. Then, female candidate was also evaluated base on 12 nursing qualities using 1-10 scale ( 1 = not at all, 10 = extremely). Lastly, demographic information was also completed by participants. The dependent variable including attractiveness was measured by a 1-10 Likert scale ( 1 = not at all, 10 = extremely), hiring decision is also measured by two answers yes or no. In contrast, the independent variable as level of tanness was manipulated by tanned and non-tanned version.

The results confirmed the hypotheses for both two studies. Specifically, the results in study 1 supported that male applicants with tanned skin would have more possibilities to be recommended hiring compare to those applicants in the non-tan condition. However, results stated that there were no significant differences among gender, which also concludes that tanned skin did play an important role in hireability at workplace for both men and women. Moreover, results also confirmed the second hypothesis such that female applicants with tan skin would be more likely to get hired in comparison to those applicants with non-tan skin. Surprisingly, this conclusion was reported based on female applicants' attractiveness. In another words, tanned female applicants were also evaluated as more attractive and more positive compare to candidates with non-tanned

condition. Lastly, tanned applicants were considered more proficient in their occupation, especially in nursing area.

This study supports the past research on skin color as well as tan or non-tan skin had influence on the discernment about physical attributions at workplace. Specifically, the current study fits in the past research by observing that tan skin will definitely enhance the physical appearance, increase the perception of attractiveness as well as certain characteristic features. Also, the study also supports the idea of attractive individuals more often obtained numerous of advantages in working environment (Dion, Bercheid, & Walster, 1972). Besides, one limitation was noted by the author is that there were many other elements involved in physical appearance in order to make a judgment such as facial gesture, eye size, or body hair. The authors also emphasized another limitation was that both photos of man and woman candidates were Caucasian. Therefore, participants might have different judgments if tan skin diversified by other race or ethnicity groups . Also, the hiring determination might be restricted to a specific health field as nursing and student counseling position so that the perspective could be different according to different job field. Therefore, Gillen and Bernstein (2015) suggested that the future studies should investigate more on different factors including facial expression, size of eyes to know if hiring decision is affected by other factors. Finally, the authors have raised an awareness that hiring managers and employers must be well-versed and pay more attention to not only the problem of physical aspects bias but also tan bias.

## References

- Gillen, M. M., & Bernstein, M. J. (2015). Does tanness mean goodness? Perceptions of tan skin in hiring decisions. *North American Journal of Psychology* , 17(1), 1-16. Retrieved from <https://search-ebshost-com.lib-proxy.fullerton.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=psyh&AN=2015-18477-001&site=ehost-live&scope=site>