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The Effect of Black Women's Skin Tone on  
College Students' Ratings of Their Employability: A Preliminary Study

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## Abstract

This study investigated the effect of Black women's skin-tone on employability ratings. Employability ratings were defined by three measures: personal evaluation, qualifications-for-employment, and racial discrimination. Forty Black and forty White college students participated in the study. All participants were asked to read a job description and a resume, examine a picture of a hypothetical job candidate, and rate the candidate's employability by completing three response sheets. All participants received the same job description, resume and response sheets; half received a picture of a light-skinned woman and half received a dark-skinned picture. Men who rated the light-skinned applicant were more inclined to hire her than the men who rated the dark-skinned applicant, while women were equally inclined to hire both. Whites who rated the light-skinned applicant found her more employable than those who rated the dark-skinned one, whereas Blacks were equally inclined to hire both. Blacks, more than Whites, indicated that both applicants would experience discrimination.

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Discrimination based on skin tone is an issue that the Black American community has faced since the time of slavery. Slavery was the first institution that placed Blacks into a caste system defined by color. This caste system has its origins in the interracial mixing of enslaved Africans and Whites. Slave owners would have sexual relations with enslaved African women who, as a result of the illicit union, would conceive racially mixed offspring who formed a class of enslaved people referred to as "Mulatto." From the outset, its members were treated differently from other enslaved Blacks. Instead of working in the fields, mixed race Blacks were often house servants. They wore better clothing and some were educated. In the slave economy, mixed race Blacks were beneficial to slave masters because they were sold at a higher price than other Blacks (especially women). This "special" treatment of light-skinned Blacks over dark-skinned Blacks occurred because Whites perceived mixed race Blacks as "genetically" superior because of the contribution of White blood (Russell, Wilson & Hall, 1993; Keith & Herring, 1991; Neal & Wilson, 1989).

After the Civil War, differential treatment based on skin color continued to prosper in White America. Lighter skinned Blacks received better jobs and education than darker skinned Blacks. For example, in the late 1800's, light-skinned men could receive PhD's, whereas dark-skinned men could not (Neal & Wilson, 1989). In the job market, some very light-skinned Blacks claimed themselves to be White in order to receive better jobs, but they had to disconnect from Black relatives to avoid getting caught (Myrdal, 1962).

In the beginning of the post-antebellum era, mixed race Blacks also began to marry only other light-skinned Blacks to avoid the possibility of having dark-skinned offspring (Myrdal, 1962; Keith & Herring, 1991). As intramarrying continued, the result was a social stratification that continued to benefit lighter skinned Blacks. Mixed Black women were seen as beautiful because their light skin color, facial features and straighter hair were similar to European features. Dark-skinned women, whose features were dissimilar to Europeans, were viewed as less attractive (Russell et al., 1993).

Black men also embraced the European standard of beauty, making the situation more difficult for Black women. Many Black men with higher financial status would marry light-skinned women because in White America, having such women would give them higher societal status. In response, dark-skinned women would frequently strive to attain desired European characteristics. For example, dark-skinned women would use grease to try to straighten their hair (Russell et al., 1993). Later in this period and into the twentieth century, the European standard of beauty was such an influence in the Black community that females started to use hot irons to straighten their hair and bleaching creams to lighten their skin (Russell et al., 1993; Hall, 1995; Okazawa-Rey, Robinson, & Ward, 1986).

Skin tone not only played an enormous part in the standards of beauty, but also in social membership. For example, many Black social organizations would initiate their members through a “paper bag” test. This test would compare the candidate’s skin complexion to a brown paper bag. If the candidate’s complexion was darker than the bag, that person would not be admitted into the organization. Skin tone was also important in mate selection. A doctoral dissertation conducted in 1950 by James Kirk found that only

2.8 percent of 177 Black high school students would choose to marry dark-skinned Blacks (Goering, 1972; Neal & Wilson, 1989; Russell et al., 1993; Hall, 1995).

Even into the late twentieth century, bleaching creams and straightening combs were still among the top beauty products utilized by Black American women (Russell et al., 1993). Economically, light-skinned Blacks were still receiving elite status in the professional fields, as compared to dark-skinned Blacks. Edwards (1959) conducted a study of 300 Washington, DC Black professionals and found more light-skinned Blacks in the medical, dental, legal and teaching professions than dark-skinned Blacks. In the selection of spouses, Blacks still preferred light skin over dark skin (Okazawa-Rey et al., 1986).

Derbyshire (1966) conducted a study of 102 Black college students and found that some believed that light-skinned Blacks had fewer negative characteristics than brown or dark-skinned Blacks. Also, many students believed that light-skinned Blacks were more culturally accepted than other Blacks. However, during this period, the Civil Rights Movement emerged to give Blacks a sign of hope. In the beginning of the Civil Rights movement, the skin tone issue was not the salient factor. Instead, the issues of equal rights and job opportunities became primary concerns for Black America (Neal & Wilson, 1989). In 1964, Title VII of the US Civil Rights Act banned discriminatory hiring practices based on sex, color and race. This Act stated,

It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer - (1) to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national

origin; or (2) to limit, segregate, or classify his employees or applicants for employment in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect his status as an employee, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. (The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2000, p. 1).

Title VII and the emergence of Affirmative Action policies gave Blacks a chance for decent employment. Blacks now had an opportunity to become part of the job market (Fosu, 1992).

The Civil Rights Movement provided opportunities for higher economic and educational achievement, which led to a large Black middle-class. A distinct sense of Black consciousness evolved and contributions by Blacks to history, writing and music became recognized as significant in America. White standards of beauty for Blacks started to diminish and dark skin, coarse hair and full lips defined the new standard (Neal & Wilson, 1989; Keith & Herring; 1991).

In the 1970's, "Black is beautiful" became a way of life. "Afros" and "Dashikis" became an Afrocentric style for Black Americans (Okazawa-Rey et al., 1986). Studies that were conducted during this time found that Blacks felt more confident about their skin tone. Goering (1972) revisited Kirk's dissertation with high school students and found a drastic change in mate selection. He found that almost 17 per cent agreed that they would marry a dark-skinned person and 80 per cent said they did not wish to change their skin tone to a lighter complexion. Keith and Herring (1991) analyzed the National Survey of Black Americans (1979-1980) to determine whether there were still any differences in socioeconomic status between light-skinned Blacks and dark-skinned

Blacks. They found that having light skin was still an advantage. The average education level for light-skinned Blacks was greater than 12 years, whereas dark-skinned Blacks' average education level was under 10 years. In family incomes, the average wage for light-skinned Blacks was over \$16,500 per year, whereas dark-skinned Blacks earned an average of \$11,000 per year. For individual incomes, light-skinned Blacks earned an average exceeding \$10,000 per year, whereas dark-skinned Blacks earned less than \$7,000 per year. Light-skinned Blacks occupied more professional positions, while dark-skinned Blacks occupied more service positions. These differences reflected the persistent bias in favor of light-skinned Blacks. Keith and Herring concluded that the influence of skin tone discrimination since the time of slavery has resulted in a "social stratification" in Black America. This stratification has given light-skinned Blacks and their descendants the advantage of higher socioeconomic status.

In examining the historical background of upper class Blacks, Mullins and Sites (1984) found that most of their genealogy included ancestors of a light skin tone. They suggested reasons why socioeconomic status correlated with skin tone. First, they proposed that discrimination in favor of light-skinned Blacks has persisted since slavery. Second, descendants of light-skinned Blacks not only inherit their parents' skin tone, but they also inherit the benefits of higher socioeconomic status that accompany it. Keith and Herring (1991) also proposed that many light-skinned Blacks marry light-skinned Blacks to maintain their socioeconomic position.

Even heading into the twenty-first century, there are studies that reveal that skin tone discrimination still exists. Bond and Cash (1992) conducted a study on Black female college students and found that the majority believed that their Black male counterparts

preferred light-skinned women to dark-skinned women. A follow up study was conducted by Coard, Breland and Raskin (2001) in which they used Black female and male college students and found that both males and females believed that males preferred light-skinned women to dark-skinned women.

In examining the history of skin tone discrimination, Black women appear to have the most problems. First, lighter skin tone is considered a standard of beauty. Second, skin tone, through its influence on beauty standards, has an effect on mate selection. Third, skin tone has an effect on societal and socioeconomic status. Given these findings, it is also likely that skin tone could also be a target of job and career discrimination against Black women.

#### Skin Tone Discrimination as a Factor in Career Discrimination against Black Women

Career discrimination against Black women has been represented in many forms. At the beginning of World War I and the influence of the industrial revolution, factory jobs were promising and provided a substantial amount of money. However, Black women did not receive many factory opportunities because White women were being employed first (Hesse-Biber, 1986).

The 1960's witnessed an increase in the number of executive positions in the corporate world with an expansion to 8 million professional positions. With the Civil Rights Act and affirmative action, Blacks anticipated better jobs. Many economists predicted that women would be more fully accepted in the marketplace. Yet Black women received only 0.6 percent of these positions while White women received 13.0 percent (Sokoloff, 1988).

In the 1970's, more corporate jobs were available to Black women, however salary analyses did not reflect significant inroads. In 1969, the yearly income for many Black women was below \$3000 (only 20 per cent of Black men earned a yearly income of \$3000 or less; many Black men received higher). In 1970, the average weekly income for Black women was lower than that of Black men. Furthermore, Black women were given the lowest salaries when it came to incomes of \$10,000 or more (Nelson, 1975).

Skin tone discrimination could be a factor in career discrimination against Black women. The "mulatto hypothesis" states that Whites tend to be more comfortable around Blacks who are mixed due to the contribution of White blood. This might extend to lighter skinned Blacks as well. In civil service positions, it has been reported that there are higher numbers of light-skinned Blacks than dark-skinned Blacks (Russell et al., 1993). Although the "Mulatto hypothesis" is an old racist perspective, it is possible that it has a current subtle presence in the job market.

### Stereotypes and Employee Selection

In an ideal US society, everyone would be seen as a person, not a gender or race. However, this rarely happens. People use stereotypes in order to "reduce their information processing demands" (Falkenberg, 1990, pg. 107). The fault with stereotypes is that once one believes a certain stereotype, it is difficult to change that perception. In the workplace, stereotypes often come into play with employee selection.

When employers open a job position, they automatically have a stereotype of who the ideal candidate will be. If it is a White employer, he or she may see a White employee. If it is a Black employer, she or he may see a Black employee. Rand and Wexley (1975) proposed that the "similar-to-me" effect, the phenomenon in which

people prefer those who are similar to them, would influence employers to hire someone who is similar to them. There have been a few studies that have analyzed how race and sex interact with the “similar-to-me” concept. For example, Schmitt and Hill (1977) found that White male “raters” gave higher ratings to White male “ratees” than Black female “ratees.” Landy and Farr (1980) believed that this effect also influences performance ratings. In their process model of performance rating, they indicated that ratees would receive higher ratings from raters who are from the same race.

Another factor that could possibly have an effect on employee selection is the “what is beautiful is good” stereotype, which declares that a person who is attractive also possesses other positive characteristics, such as intelligence. Empirical evidence such as the Derbyshire (1966) study has supported this phenomenon. A study by Kim and Wheeler (1997) found that Korean college students who rated people as attractive, also associated them with positive characteristics such as intellect and competence. Another study by Maddox and Gray (2002) found that Black and White college students gave more positive stereotypes (i.e. attractiveness and intellect) to light-skinned compared to dark-skinned women. Applying this to the workplace, researchers have found that those who have good physical characteristics have a better chance of promotion (Morrow, 1990).

There have not been many studies that examined the role of both race and physical attractiveness in the workplace. Patzer (1985) found that Blacks who were viewed as attractive were rated as having written better essays than those who were viewed as unattractive. However, they did not measure skin tone as a factor in attractiveness (cited in Morrow, 1990).

Applying the physical attractiveness stereotype to the “similar-to-me” concept, one may find why light-skinned Blacks could receive better jobs and promotions. Since European standards of beauty are desired in America and light-skinned Blacks tend to meet these standards more than dark-skinned Blacks, stereotypes may result. For example, Whites may see light-skinned Blacks as more intelligent and having positive characteristics because of their similarity of features and thus, their perceived attractiveness. Dark-skinned Blacks do not hold as many similarities. Therefore, Whites may see them as less intelligent and as having negative characteristics. These social concepts may provide an explanation for how skin tone might play a role in the selection of Black women in the workplace.

Past studies that have focused on skin tone discrimination have mostly utilized measures of physical attractiveness, but have not applied these findings to the workplace. According to past research, Blacks and Whites, both tend to discriminate against dark-skinned Blacks (Goering, 1972; Russell et al., 1993; Keith & Herring, 1991; Neal & Wilson, 1989). Research has also shown that Black women have been underrepresented in the corporate job market (Sokoloff, 1988). Skin tone discrimination could be a reason why this underrepresentation exists.

The current study attempted to explore the potential effect of skin tone discrimination in the corporate job market. This was done through an analogue situation in which Black and White college students rated the employability of two Black women with different skin tones. Employability ratings were defined by 3 measures: (a) personal evaluation, the participant’s likelihood of hiring the applicant; (b) qualifications-for-employment, the likelihood of the applicant being hired based on certain characteristics;

and (c) racial discrimination, the likelihood of the applicant being subjected to discrimination based on race, ethnicity and skin complexion. Because Black Americans are both the objects and the perpetrators of skin tone discrimination and because of its origins in White racism, we have selected Black and White students only. Also, the perspectives of college students might be useful because they are likely to become the potential employers in the corporate job market. By analyzing their perspectives, one may foresee and prevent skin tone discrimination in future job markets.

This study has three hypotheses: (a) participants will give lower personal evaluation and qualifications-for-employment ratings to the dark-skinned job applicant than to the light-skinned one; (b) White participants will give lower personal evaluation and qualifications-for-employment ratings to the dark-skinned job applicant than Black participants; and, (c) Blacks will be more likely than Whites to indicate that the applicant's skin tone will have an effect on her chances of being employed. We have based our hypotheses on the history of antagonism between Blacks and Whites. The literature states that dark-skinned Black Americans have been mistreated by Whites and other Blacks. Thus, similar patterns are predicted by our hypotheses. If these hypotheses are supported through the findings, then it will suggest that skin tone discrimination may be a factor in the selection of Black women for employment.

#### Phase 1

In the first phase, we selected the two photos to be used in the second phase of the study.

## *Method*

### *Participants*

Ten Black males, ten Black females, ten White males and ten White females whose ages ranged from 18 to 20 ( $M = 18.7$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ) were recruited from a small comprehensive college in the Northeastern US. They were contacted via college dormitories and personal telephone contacts.

### *Materials*

A five-point scale was developed by the experimenter to rate four pictures of Black women with different skin tones. The scale ranged from extremely unattractive = 1, not very attractive = 2, somewhat attractive = 3, very attractive = 4, extremely attractive = 5. The pictures were chosen by the experimenter from Black American magazines. In all of the pictures, the women were dressed in professional business suit attire and had similar facial features: short hair length, smooth hair texture, dark brown eye color, similar lip fullness and nose width. Two of the women had very light skin complexions and two of the women had dark brown complexions. Two of the pictures were head and shoulder shots and two were of women who were standing in front of automobiles. Adobe Photoshop version 5.5, an image editing program, was used to manipulate the size of the pictures.

### *Procedure*

In the dorms, the experimenter knocked on the doors of the students' rooms, verbally gave a brief explanation of the study, and asked them to participate. They were

told that this was a senior thesis project and were simply asked to rate the attractiveness of the women in some photos. No further information about the study was given. After the students filled out the consent form, which asked for the participants' race and sex, the experimenter gave each participant four photos and asked them to rate the attractiveness of the women in the photos using the attractiveness scale.

### *Results*

We calculated the means for each photo and selected the most attractive light-skinned picture ( $M = 3.5$ ,  $SD=0.51$ ) and dark-skinned picture ( $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD =0.47$ ). Both pictures were head and shoulder shots of the women. We conducted a repeated measures ANOVA with sex and race of participants as between-factors in order to determine whether the two selected photos were rated at similar levels of attractiveness. There was neither a main effect of picture nor a significant interaction with subject race or sex. In other words, the pictures were judged equal in attractiveness by each of the four groups.

### *Phase 2*

#### *Method*

##### *Design*

This phase of the study utilized a 2X2X2 factorial quasi-experimental design. The independent variable was skin tone of the women in the two pictures with two levels: light-skinned and dark-skinned. The dependent variables were the mean ratings of the employability measures that participants gave to the pictured women. The study employed a between-subjects design; for each group of participants (Black males, Black females, White males, White females), half of the individuals viewed the light-skinned photos and the other half viewed the dark-skinned photos.

### *Participants*

Forty Black and forty White students whose ages ranged from 18 to 67 ( $M=22.7$ ,  $SD=9.93$ ) were recruited from a small comprehensive college in the Northeastern US. They were contacted via psychology classes and student organizations (see Table 1). We also recruited from Black student organizations in order to get adequate numbers of Black participants.

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 Insert Table 1 here  
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### *Measures and Materials*

Each of the two pictures chosen in Phase 1 was presented with the same job description and resume, both of which were selected from samples provided by a career services office and reflected typical requirements of an automobile sales manager. The resume indicated that the applicant was a candidate for a Master's Degree in Business Administration and had six years of experience as a new-car salesperson.

Three response sheets were developed by the experimenter to rate the employability of the applicant. The first response sheet had one item, personal evaluation, which asked the participant's opinion of the likelihood that he or she would hire the candidate. The second response sheet had seven items related to qualifications-for-employment. Five items asked the likelihood of the candidate getting employment based on educational background, experiential background, interpersonal skills, strengths or qualities, and ability to handle stress. Two items asked the likelihood of the candidate being hired by the company and the chances of the candidate receiving a promotion from

the company in a period of two years. The third response sheet had ten items related to gender and racial discrimination. Three items asked how likely the candidate's sex, ethnicity, and skin complexion would affect her chances of employment. Three items asked how likely the candidate's sex, ethnicity, and skin complexion would affect her promotional opportunities. Two items asked how likely it was that the candidate would experience sexual or racial discrimination within the company. Two items asked how likely it was that the candidate had experienced sexual or racial discrimination in the past. Gender discrimination was included only as a distraction from the study's true focus. Each response sheet used a 5-point scale (extremely unlikely = 1, not very likely = 2, somewhat likely = 3, very likely = 4 and extremely likely = 5).

We generated three measures out of the 18-item survey. The first measure was personal evaluation, which was asked for on the first response sheet. The second measure was related to qualifications-for-employment. We generated a composite score by adding all of the responses from the second response sheet. The third measure was racial discrimination. We generated a composite score by adding the items on the third response sheet that asked about ethnicity and skin complexion affecting the candidate's chances of employment, promotion, and likelihood of experiencing racial discrimination.

### *Procedure*

Participants were given a consent form explaining the purpose of the study and asking them to indicate their race and sex. They were told that this was a senior thesis project and that they were to analyze a picture and a resume and answer a questionnaire about the job applicant. After they filled out the consent form, they were randomly

assigned to one of two conditions: rating the employability of a light-skinned woman and rating the employability of a dark-skinned woman.

The experimenter gave a folder containing one of the two pictures, a resume, a job description, and three response sheets to each participant. All participants received the same job description and resume. Using the response sheets, participants rated the employability of the candidates based on the resume and job description provided. They were given the following instructions:

Pretend that you are a top executive of one of the most distinguished companies in the nation. At this time, your company has a career position open and you must help decide who is qualified for this position. Some representatives of your company have gone to colleges to recruit “soon-to-be” graduates. You have received hundreds of resumes from these students and now you must help select one person for this position. In this packet, you have a resume, a picture and a rating sheet. The rating sheet asks specific questions about education, experience, etc. You must rate this person with the provided scale. This sheet will be presented to your superior and he/she will make the final decision of who is going to be hired for this position. You can take all the time that you need to rate this person. Please think and read carefully before you make your final decision.

Thank you.

### *Results*

Table 2 illustrates the means of each measure by the skin tone of the applicant. Overall, the entire sample did not differ much in the racial discrimination ratings between the light-skinned picture and the dark-skinned picture of the applicant. With the personal

evaluation measure and the qualifications-for-employment measure, there was a tendency for the light-skinned picture to receive higher ratings than the dark-skinned picture.

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For each measure, we performed a three way ANOVA to examine the effects of applicant's skin tone, participant's race, and participant's sex. In each analysis, we looked at the three-way interaction (skin tone x race x sex) as well as at two of the two-way interactions (race x skin tone and sex x skin tone). For the racial discrimination measure, we were also interested in whether there was a main effect of race (are Blacks more likely to expect discrimination than Whites?). Significant interactions were followed up by t-tests examining the difference between ratings for particular groups. All analyses were performed with an alpha level of .05. Only significant findings are reported in this section. Any findings that are not reported were not found to be significant.

Table 3 illustrates the mean scores of the personal evaluation and qualifications-for-employment measures by race and sex of the participants. Table 4 illustrates the ANOVAs of the personal evaluation and qualifications-for-employment measures. With our first measure, personal evaluation, we found a significant two-way interaction of sex and skin tone,  $F(1, 79) = 6.211, p = 0.015$ . In order to further examine this interaction, we separately compared light and dark skin tone ratings for male and female participants. For male participants, the light-skinned applicant received significantly higher ratings,  $t(38) = 3.53, p = 0.001$ . For females, there were no statistically significant differences between the ratings of the applicants,  $t(38) = 0.575, p = 0.569$ .

With the composite measure for qualifications-for-employment, we found a significant two-way interaction of race and skin tone,  $F(1,79) = 5.881, p = 0.018$ . In order to further examine this interaction, we separately compared light and dark skin tone ratings for Black and White participants. For White participants, the light-skinned applicant received significantly higher ratings,  $t(38) = 2.536, p = 0.016$ . For Black participants, there were no statistically significant differences between the two applicants,  $t(38) = -1.142, p = 0.261$ . We also found that when it came to the ratings of the dark-skinned applicant, Black participants gave significantly higher ratings than White participants,  $t(38) = 2.092, p = 0.043$ .

We found similar interactions with three individual items of this measure: applicant's ability to handle stressful situations, applicant's likelihood of receiving a promotion by the company in two years, and the applicant's experiential background. With the applicant's ability to handle stress, we found a significant two-way interaction of race and skin tone,  $F(1,79) = 3.903, p = 0.05$ . In order to further examine this interaction, we separately compared light and dark skin tone ratings for Black and White participants. For the dark-skinned applicant, Black participants gave significantly higher ratings than White participants,  $t(38) = 2.926, p = 0.006$ . For the light-skinned applicant, there were no significant differences between White and Black participants,  $t(38) = -0.182, p = 0.857$ .

With the applicant's likelihood of receiving a promotion, we found a significant two-way interaction of race and skin tone,  $F(1, 79) = 5.505, p = 0.02$ . We compared the light and dark skin tone ratings for Black and White participants. For White participants, the light-skinned applicant received significantly higher ratings than the dark-skinned

applicant,  $t(38) = 2.368, p = 0.02$ . For Black participants, there were no significant differences of ratings between the two applicants,  $t(38) = -1.150, p = 0.257$ .

With the applicant's experiential background, we found a significant two-way interaction of race and skin tone,  $F(1, 79) = 8.143, p = 0.006$ . We compared the light and dark skin tone ratings for Black and White participants. For White participants, the light-skinned applicant received significantly higher ratings than the dark-skinned applicant,  $t(38) = 2.757, p = 0.009$ . For Black participants, there were no significant differences of ratings between the two applicants,  $t(38) = -1.360, p = 0.182$ .

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Insert Table 3 Here

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Insert Table 4 Here

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Table 5 illustrates the mean scores of the racial discrimination items and composite measure by race and sex of the participants. Table 6 illustrates the ANOVAs of the racial discrimination items and composite measure. We found a significant main effect of race for the racial discrimination composite measure and all of its items. With the racial discrimination composite measure, Black participants rated both applicants' chances of being subjected to racial discrimination significantly higher than White participants did,  $F(1, 79) = 15.73, p = < .001$ . When asked the applicant's chances of experiencing racial discrimination within the company and in the past, regardless of skin

tone, Black participants gave significantly higher ratings than White participants,  $F(1,79) = 11.49, p = 0.001$ ,  $F(1,79) = 5.944, p = 0.017$  (respectively).

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When asked the likelihood of the applicant's ethnicity affecting her chances of being hired and promoted, regardless of skin tone, Blacks gave significantly higher ratings than White participants,  $F(1,79) = 15.29, p < .001$ ,  $F(1,79) = 12.07, p = 0.001$  (respectively). When asked the likelihood of the applicant's skin tone affecting her chances of being hired and receiving a promotion, regardless of skin tone, Black participants gave significantly higher ratings than White participants,  $F(1,79) = 10.35, p = 0.002$ ,  $F(1,79) = 12.66, p = 0.001$  (respectively).

#### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to see if there were any differences in the employability ratings of two Black women applicants based on their skin tone. Our first hypothesis was that the dark-skinned applicant would receive lower personal evaluation and qualifications-for-employment ratings than the light-skinned applicant. Our findings partially supported this hypothesis with regard to the personal evaluation measure. Regardless of race, men who evaluated the light-skinned applicant indicated a greater

likelihood of hiring her than the men who evaluated the dark-skinned applicant. This is consistent with the previous literature (Russell et al., 1993; Hall, 1995; Okazawa-Rey et al., 1986; Bond & Cash, 1992; Coard et al., 2001; Maddox & Gray, 2002) that indicated that skin tone has an effect on mate selection and perceptions of physical attractiveness and intelligence, and that light-skinned women are more likely to be selected. Although the findings do not indicate that all participants select light skin over dark skin, they do indicate that male participants are selective. Applying this to the marketplace, since men own a majority of companies, it is important to consider the possibility that skin tone might affect the hiring of women applicants.

Our second hypothesis stated that White participants would give lower personal evaluation and qualifications-for-employment ratings to the dark-skinned applicant than Black participants. Our findings supported this hypothesis with regard to the qualifications-for-employment measure. White participants gave significantly lower scores to the dark-skinned applicant in comparison to the Black participants. Furthermore, White participants gave significantly higher scores to the light-skinned applicant than the dark-skinned applicant. In contrast, Black participants did not score one applicant significantly higher than the other. A possible explanation for this finding is found in previous literature (Schmitt & Hill, 1977; Landy & Farr, 1980) that suggested that race is a factor in the “similar -to-me” effect. Landy and Farr’s (1980) process model of performance rating indicates that raters would give higher ratings to those who are racially similar to them. Consistent with this model, our White participants responded more positively to the light-skinned applicant who was more racially similar to them. For

Black participants, both applicants were of their race, so there were no significant differences in the ratings.

Our third hypothesis was that Blacks would be more likely than Whites to indicate that the applicant's skin tone will have an effect on her chances of being employed. When participants were asked if the applicant's skin tone would affect the applicant's employment and promotional chances, Blacks, more than Whites, indicated that skin tone would have an effect. Similar findings occurred with the ethnicity questions in the racial discrimination measure. These findings support our hypothesis; since Blacks are the objects of racial discrimination, not only would they be more aware of racial discrimination, but they would also be more aware of other discriminations, like skin tone discrimination. Whites are less likely to be the objects of racial discrimination, so they would be less likely to be aware of skin tone discrimination. Also, Whites may be more hesitant to report that fellow Whites would discriminate against Blacks.

All of the findings are consistent with previous studies that have reported that light-skinned Blacks are preferred over dark-skinned Blacks. Mullins and Sites (1984) found that ever since the early part of the twentieth century, light-skinned Blacks have achieved higher socioeconomic statuses than dark-skinned Blacks. They found that in mate selection, most Blacks have reported over the years that they preferred a light-skinned mate to a dark-skinned mate. Keith and Herring (1991) analyzed the income of Black Americans in 1980 and found that light-skinned Black Americans had the highest socioeconomic statuses in the Black community. Applying these findings to the previous literature, it may help explain why light-skinned Blacks received higher socioeconomic status than dark-skinned Blacks. If light-skinned persons are more likely to be selected

for employment in an analogue situation, this could be possible in actual employment selection in the job market.

Also, most of our findings were consistent with our hypotheses, except for our first one. We hypothesized that all of the participants would give lower personal evaluation and qualifications-for-employment ratings to the dark-skinned applicant. However, the findings indicated that only males (not all participants) gave lower personal evaluation (but not qualifications-for-employment) ratings to the dark-skinned applicant. This is a puzzling finding that needs to be addressed in future research.

There are a few limitations to the study. First, in Phase 1, two of the photos were head and shoulder pictures of women; the other two photos were women standing in front of automobiles. This may have affected how the pictures were rated. Second, in Phase 2, the dark-skinned picture was grainy because it was expanded from a very small photo. This could have affected the participant's ratings of the dark-skinned applicant. Third, the items in the questionnaire were not tested for reliability, so we do not know if the participants would give the same responses again.

Another limitation is that the Black participants were not asked about their ethnicity. This could have an effect on the selection of the applicant. For example, a Black person who was born and raised in Jamaica might have rated the pictures differently than a Black person who was born and raised in the United States. Replicating this study with Black persons who were born and raised in other countries in the African Diaspora (eg. Jamaica, Dominican Republic, Haiti) may show different results because they are less likely to have been exposed to the specific types of skin tone discrimination found in the United States.

Lastly, this study was done in an academic setting. Even though college students are potential employers in the future US workforce, they are not representative of managers or employers in the present workforce. Replicating this study in corporate environments with a light-skinned woman and a dark-skinned woman instead of photographs may show different results.

An advantage to this study is that the participants were not told that the picture was a part of the criteria for measuring the applicant's employability. This reduced demand effects, since the participants were not given information on the skin tone of the applicants.

This study has contributed preliminary evidence that skin tone is a possible factor involved in employment discrimination. Studies such as this can be used in programs for corporate employers and managers across America. They will show others that skin tone discrimination exists and how it originated. With this information, corporate leaders and employees may find a way to minimize it in the workplace. Also, it may make Black women candidates more aware of this problem, which might help them develop resilience against it.

In conclusion, given the diversity in the United States population, one would expect to find similar diversity in the corporations of this country. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the affirmative action policy made it possible for people of all races, creeds and colors to interact in the business world. However, this diversity has not manifested to its fullest potential. In order for it to do so, we must analyze all the factors involved in workplace discrimination. Skin tone discrimination is a feature of racism. If we find time

in the workplace to discuss the origins of racism and why it exists today, we may find a way to eliminate it and improve race relations in the workplace.

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*Table 1**Demographic Characteristics of Sample*

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Characteristics	Students
	N=80
Age	
Mean	22.7
SD	9.93
Range	18 -67
Sex (%)	
Male	50
Female	50
Race (%)	
Black	50
White	50

*Table 2**Means and SDs of employability measures by skin tone of applicant*

	Light Skin Picture N=40 Mean (SD)	Dark Skin Picture N=40 Mean (SD)	Total Sample N=80 Mean (SD)
Personal Evaluation	4.40 (0.67)	3.95 (0.71)	4.18 (0.73)
Qualifications- for-employment	28.40 (4.45)	27.83 (3.39)	28.11 (3.94)
Racial Discrimination	16.65 (5.88)	16.68 (5.59)	16.65 (5.88)

Table 3

Means and SDs of employability measures by race and sex of participants

Variables	Light-Skinned Picture				Dark-Skinned Picture			
	Black Participants		White Participants		Black Participants		White Participants	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	N = 10	N = 10	N = 10	N = 10	N = 10	N = 10	N = 10	N = 10
	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)
Personal Evaluation	4.10 (.74)	4.60 (.70)	4.60 (.70)	4.30 (.48)	3.70 (.82)	4.50 (.53)	3.40 (.51)	4.20 (.42)
Education	4.10 (.88)	4.70 (.48)	4.70 (.48)	4.40 (.52)	4.60 (.52)	4.70 (.48)	4.40 (.70)	4.20 (1.23)
Experience	3.80 (1.03)	4.10 (.57)	4.30 (.82)	4.50 (.53)	4.10 (.88)	4.50 (.70)	3.50 (.70)	4.10 (.57)
Interpersonal skills	4.00 (.94)	4.30 (.48)	4.30 (.67)	4.30 (.68)	4.30 (.82)	4.40 (.52)	4.10 (.74)	4.00 (.67)
Applicant's strengths	4.00 (.82)	4.30 (.68)	4.40 (.52)	4.20 (.63)	3.70 (.95)	4.20 (.42)	4.00 (.47)	4.30 (.48)
Ability to handle stress	3.90 (.95)	3.90 (.88)	4.00 (.94)	3.90 (.74)	4.50 (.85)	4.20 (.63)	3.40 (.70)	4.00 (.47)
Hire by company	3.60 (1.08)	3.60 (.84)	4.30 (.68)	4.00 (.82)	3.70 (.82)	3.70 (.95)	3.40 (.52)	3.70 (.82)
Promotion by company	3.60 (1.17)	2.80 (1.23)	3.90 (.88)	3.70 (.68)	3.80 (.79)	3.40 (1.08)	3.00 (.94)	3.40 (.70)
Qualifications-for-employment composite	27.0 (5.98)	27.7 (4.03)	29.9 (4.07)	29.0 (3.43)	28.7 (4.22)	29.1 (2.77)	25.8 (2.90)	27.7 (2.95)

Table 4

Analysis of Variance for employability measures

Variables	<u>df</u>	3-way interaction	Sex by skin tone of applicant	Race by skin tone of applicant
	Between subjects			
Personal Evaluation	1, 79	2.028	6.211*	2.028
Education	1, 79	0.900	0.400	2.500
Experience	1, 79	0.203	0.560	8.143*
Interpersonal skills	1, 79	0.025	0.227	2.042
Applicant's strengths	1, 79	0.271	1.475	1.475
Ability to handle stress	1, 79	1.990	0.319	3.903*
Hire by company	1, 79	0.653	0.653	3.556
Promotion by company	1, 79	0.055	1.376	5.505*
Qualifications-for-employment composite	1, 79	0.782	0.509	5.881*

\*  $p \leq .05$ \*\*  $p \leq .01$

Table 5

*Means and SDs of discrimination measures by race and sex of participants*

Variables	Light-Skinned Picture				Dark-Skinned Picture			
	Black Participants		White Participants		Black Participants		White Participants	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	N = 10	N = 10	N = 10	N = 10	N = 10	N = 10	N = 10	N = 10
	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)	Mean (S.D.)
Ethnicity affects being hired	2.40 (1.17)	3.30 (1.16)	2.10 (.88)	2.50 (1.08)	3.60 (1.26)	3.30 (1.25)	1.70 (.82)	2.50 (.97)
Ethnicity affects promotion	3.00 (1.49)	3.30 (1.06)	2.20 (.92)	2.80 (1.23)	3.40 (1.26)	3.00 (.94)	1.70 (.82)	2.60 (.84)
Experience racial discrimination with company	2.70 (1.34)	3.30 (.67)	2.20 (1.03)	2.70 (.95)	3.10 (.74)	3.20 (.92)	1.90 (1.10)	2.70 (.82)
Experience racial discrimination in the past	3.10 (1.52)	4.10 (.74)	2.80 (1.23)	3.00 (.82)	3.50 (1.18)	3.40 (.52)	2.90 (.95)	3.10 (1.10)
Skin tone affects being hired	3.00 (1.49)	3.10 (1.20)	2.00 (.94)	2.60 (1.08)	3.40 (1.17)	2.80 (1.14)	1.90 (1.10)	2.50 (.97)
Skin tone affects promotion	2.70 (1.34)	3.10 (1.10)	1.90 (.95)	2.60 (1.08)	3.40 (1.26)	2.90 (.88)	1.70 (.95)	2.50 (.85)
Racial discrimination composite	16.9 (7.78)	20.2 (4.71)	13.2 (5.37)	16.2 (5.39)	20.4 (5.38)	18.6 (4.53)	11.8 (4.29)	15.9 (4.58)

Table 6

*Analysis of Variance for discrimination measures*

Variables	<u>df</u>	3-way interaction	Sex by skin tone of applicant	Race by skin tone of applicant	Race only
Between subjects					
Ethnicity affects being hired	1, 79	2.710	0.678	2.710	15.29**
Ethnicity affects promotion	1, 79	1.040	0.167	0.668	12.07**
Experience racial discrimination with company	1, 79	0.900	0.400	0.938	11.49**
Experience racial discrimination in the past	1, 79	1.360	1.360	0.281	5.944*
Skin tone affects being hired	1, 79	0.466	0.466	0.086	10.35*
Skin tone affects promotion	1, 79	1.095	0.701	0.700	12.66**
Racial discrimination composite	1, 79	1.675	0.697	0.565	15.73**

\*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$