

Your wingman could help land you a job:

How beauty composition of applicants affects the call-back probability

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Motivation

“That’s not a knife. That’s a knife.” – *Crocodile Dundee*

- We aim to combine literature on beauty premium with literature on decoy effect
- Combining the randomised CV (Correspondence testing) approach with a lab experiment
- Exploiting the German practice to include a photo in the CV
- Main result: The probability to receive a call-back is higher when a person competes with less attractive candidates of the same gender

Literature on appearance and decoy effect

- The Economics of Discrimination [Becker, 1957]
 - Taste discrimination classified into employer, employee and customer or Statistical discrimination
- Beauty premium [Hamermesh and Biddle, 1994] (see Hamermesh, 2010 for an extensive review)
- Transmission mechanisms of beauty premium (Lab: Mobius and Rosenblat, 2006)
- Correspondence testing
 - Ethnicity [Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004, Carlsson and Rooth, 2007, Kaas and Manger, 2012]
 - Obesity [Rooth, 2010]
 - Beauty [Kraft, 2012]

Additionally, the Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives assumption might be violated because:

- People tend to make decisions based on comparisons
- “[We] not only tend to compare things with one another but also tend to focus on comparing things that are easily comparable - and avoid comparing things that cannot be compared easily” [Ariely, 2008]
- Ariely(2008) also applies this concept to appearance and calls the less appealing person “wingman”

The Experiment

Experiment is conducted in a computer lab with z-Tree [Fischbacher, 2007].

- A pool of 29 photos
- Recruiting 120 university students in Hanover
- Asked to act as HR-staff and select applicants for an interview
 - Selecting 2 from 4 candidates for the interview in each position
 - 8 positions (10 in the last five sessions) classified into
 - High skilled
 - Low skilled
 - With customers contact
 - No customers contact
- CVs are similar in every other aspect except for their photos and names (randomised)
- Part 1 (4 jobs, random draw of 16 photos for 16 CVs with random characteristics):
 - For each job the decision makers see a brief job description
 - Followed by 4 candidates (photo & characteristics)
 - Followed by the decision (first and second preference)
 - After the decision is made it cannot be reversed and the DMs move to the next job
- Break (another task for ≈ 15 minutes)
- Part 2 (4-6 new jobs): new random draw of 16 photos, new random characteristics in a CV

Data

- From the experiment
 - Selected candidates for each position
 - Characteristics of the participants e.g. age, gender, parental education, Big Five
- Beauty variable
 - Rating by 40 individuals on 1-7 Likert scale
 - Constructing a composite standardized score for beauty of each photo
 - First, standardize all photos within each rater
 - Then take average for each photo across raters
- *Wingman beauty* is measured by an average beauty score of all other applicants with the same gender as applicant in the same job opening

Methodology

- **Linear Probability Model** to assess if beauty or ethnicity affect the chance of being selected for the interview:

$$y_{ij} = \beta_0 + X'_{ij}\beta + Z'_{ij}\gamma + B'_k\delta + BC_{ik}\theta + time_{ij} + D_i + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

- y_{ij} be dummies if CV i being chosen by participant j or not
- X_{ij} are vectors of the CV's characteristics
- Z_{ij} are vectors of the participant's characteristics
- B'_k is a vector for our main explanatory variables (based on the photo k appeared with each CV): female dummy, beauty rating score and dummies for ethnicity and headscarf
- BC_{ik} vectors of interaction terms and beauty composition of the pool of applicants competing for the same job
- $time_{ij}$ relative time each participant j used to look at the photo page of CV i
- D_i are dummies for the order of CV i in each job-position
- ε_{it} are the error terms
- Clustering the standard errors by photo k and participant j

Main Results. The probability to be selected

Beauty-rating (double std)	0.0615*** (0.0146)	0.0590*** (0.0177)	0.0632*** (0.0223)	0.0398* (0.0226)	0.0782*** (0.0175)
Beauty-rating*samegender	-0.0385* (0.0198)	-0.0392 (0.0275)	-0.0363 (0.0245)	-0.0237 (0.0238)	-0.0531** (0.0245)
samegender	0.0151 (0.0183)	0.0133 (0.0258)	0.0160 (0.0206)	-0.0091 (0.0251)	0.0342 (0.0240)
female	-0.0499*** (0.0167)	-0.0777*** (0.0208)	-0.0226 (0.0320)	-0.0487 (0.0346)	-0.0455* (0.0245)
Observations	4,384	2,188	2,196	2,176	2,208
R^2	0.0900	0.1039	0.0995	0.0970	0.1209
Characteristics	Categorical	Categorical	Categorical	Categorical	Categorical
Type of Occupation	All	no contact	contact	low skill	high skill
Decision-Maker	All	All	All	All	All
Beauty-rating (double std)	0.0601*** (0.0145)	0.0584*** (0.0179)	0.0610*** (0.0219)	0.0392* (0.0223)	0.0757*** (0.0174)
Wingman beauty	-0.0427* (0.0226)	-0.0195 (0.0237)	-0.0692** (0.0351)	-0.0219 (0.0251)	-0.0643** (0.0278)
Beauty-rating*samegender	-0.0383* (0.0197)	-0.0391 (0.0274)	-0.0355 (0.0241)	-0.0239 (0.0239)	-0.0519** (0.0242)
samegender	0.0148 (0.0183)	0.0130 (0.0259)	0.0160 (0.0207)	-0.0096 (0.0250)	0.0345 (0.0239)
female	-0.0346* (0.0195)	-0.0709*** (0.0225)	0.0028 (0.0345)	-0.0408 (0.0358)	-0.0228 (0.0256)
Observations	4,384	2,188	2,196	2,176	2,208
R^2	0.0912	0.1041	0.1026	0.0973	0.1235
Characteristics	Categorical	Categorical	Categorical	Categorical	Categorical
Type of Occupation	All	no contact	contact	low skill	high skill
Decision-Maker	All	All	All	All	All

Robust two-way clustered (by photo and participant) standard errors in parentheses.

Controls for position of the CV, time spend on that CV and ethnicity included.

Robustness

- The effect is more pronounced in high skilled and contact jobs
- It is robust to different specifications of beauty and Wingman beauty
- Male Decision Makers seem to largely drive the results, Wingman beauty is not significant for female recruiters.
- There seems to be no difference between the first choice and the second choice
- The results of Conditional Logit Model are qualitatively similar

Conclusion & Next Steps

- In most jobs, the prettier/smarter you are, the more likely you will be chosen for the interview
- Besides absolute beauty rating, also the relative beauty rating within the same gender matters.
- The effect adds up to the beauty rating and the gender coefficient
- Especially relevant for jobs, where male and female applicants are unevenly distributed
- Caution! External validity (outside of the university and the lab)
- **Future works**
 - More robustness checks?
 - How to exclude random clicking behaviour?