

Abstract

COLORISM IN ASSESSOR RATINGS: EXPLORING THE ROLES OF SOCIAL DOMINANCE ORIENTATION, METAPHORICAL ASSOCIATIONS AND SKIN TONE STEREOTYPES

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In recent years, public awareness of *colorism*, or discrimination based on skin tone, has grown. A previous study (Marira & Sommer, 2014) revealed that Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) (i.e., the desire for group-based hierarchy) predicted Black participants' discriminatory résumé ratings and hiring decisions in favor of lighter-skinned over darker-skinned, African American job applicants. This investigation focused on replicating and extending these findings by utilizing a more racially inclusive sample of Black and White adults and by examining more realistic candidate evaluation and hiring assessments. These simulated workplace assessments were embedded in an online business simulation requiring participants to make résumé, salary, role-play, and hiring ratings relative to both lighter- and darker-skinned African American candidates. I expected to find that darker- compared to lighter-skinned African Americans would be rated lower on all exercise ratings, and that skin tone based discrimination would be most prevalent among participants with stronger vs. weaker SDOs. I also expected to find that these results would in part be explained by participants' beliefs about skin tone stereotypes and semantic connotations that are commonly ascribed to the colors of black and white. Contrary to these predictions, findings did not support the majority of these hypotheses. In specific, SDO was not found to be a significant predictor of colorism. Negative and stereotypic beliefs regarding darker-skinned (vs. lighter-skinned) African Americans and the semantic connotations

of the colors black and white, also did not explain the relationship between SDO and colorism. Additionally, darker-skinned African Americans were not rated lower on all exercise ratings as expected. However, exploratory analyses revealed that stereotypic beliefs that African Americans with lighter (rather than darker) skin tones are friendlier and more attractive predicted higher salary awards and hiring preference for lighter-skinned, African American candidates among White, but not Black participants. Furthermore, Whites' beliefs that lighter, rather than darker-skinned African Americans are friendlier was also associated with awarding higher résumé scores to lighter-skinned Blacks and more negative résumé scores to darker-skinned Blacks. For Black participants, stereotypic beliefs about greater attractiveness and friendliness among lighter-skinned Blacks was related to assigning more positive résumé and bonus awards to lighter-skinned Blacks. However, Blacks' stereotypic beliefs regarding greater professionalism among lighter-, rather than darker-skinned African Americans, in fact predicted assigning lower résumé scores to lighter-skinned Blacks. Reasons for these findings as well as their implications for theory and practice are discussed.