

Gendered Factors Influencing College Students to Tan

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Appearance is not everything. Skin cancer from ultraviolet (UV) rays is one of the most common forms of cancer. Yet, despite the health risks, college students continue to expose themselves to these harmful rays when tanning in order to improve their appearance (Bagdasarov, Banarjee, Greene, & Campo, 2008). The term “tanning” is defined as the exposure to UV rays through sun radiation and sun-bed/sunlamp exposure (Cafri, Thompson, Roehrig, Rojas, Sperry, Jacobsen, & Hillhouse, 2008). Individuals may be more likely to tan when it is perceived to be attractive in society. Social networks are a major factor in an individual’s decision to change his or her habits and/or lifestyle in order to fall into the norm of what society perceives as attractive. Targeting social networks such as television commercials, internet ads, magazines, and radio talk shows may be the most beneficial form of intervention to reduce tanning bed use among college students, as it both directly and indirectly impacts a female’s level of self-esteem (Bagdasarov et al., 2008). A female’s self-esteem is influenced by her appearance and as a result she is more likely to tan than males (Cox, Cooper, Vess, Arndt, Goldenberg, & Routledge, 2009). A sample of college students from a midwestern university was surveyed to better understand gender differences and participants’ desire to tan and/or their willingness to risk their health.

Literature Review

Cox et al. (2009) conducted two studies to determine the influences on an individual’s decision whether or not to tan. The first study examined societal effects on an individual’s decision to tan. Cox et al.’s findings suggest whatever society perceives as attractive, whether it is tanned or pale bodies, influences the individual’s intention to tan regardless of the health risks. When tanned bodies are viewed as more attractive, the desire to tan increased however; when

pale bodies are viewed as more attractive, the desire to tan decreased. Although participants in Cox et al.'s first study were made aware of tanning-related health risks, knowing those risks did not have any effect on the intentions to tan. The greatest influence participants apparently faced in their decision to tan or not to tan was in relation to society's perceptions of tanning (Cox et al., 2009).

The second study by Cox et al. (2009) demonstrated the relationship between the levels of SPF an individual uses when choosing a tanning product and how often the product is applied based on the outcome the individual is trying to achieve. Cox et al. assert that social acceptance plays a larger role in an individual's decision to use sun block than any potential health risks. Participants whom received the message from society in which fair skin is attractive tend to use a higher SPF more frequently than when society sends the message in which tanned skin is attractive. As long as society perceives tanned bodies as attractive, participants are willing to risk terminal illnesses due to the exposure of UV rays to be socially accepted (Cox et al., 2009).

Pettijohn II et al. (2009) examined the changes in tanning attitudes and behaviors over a ten-year time period. Their research focused on the importance of tanning in relation to dating, appearance, and health. One of their two study groups included 151 male and female undergraduate college students who were surveyed on their attitudes on sun-tanning in 1995. Their second study group included 208 male and female undergraduate college students from the same university in 2005; participants of the 2005 study answered the same survey as the 1995 participants. Pettijohn II et al.'s survey consisted of a five-point scale used to assess 24 questions related to behaviors about sun-tanning and 12 questions related to the frequency of tanning. Their findings show there was not a significant change in students' attitudes toward sun-tanning; however, the 2005 sample indicates they feel more attractive with a suntan and that males tan

less than the 1995 sample of college students. Moreover, based on the behavioral questions of their survey, Pettijohn II et al. noted that the 2005 sample was more likely to engage in sun-tanning activities than the 1995 sample. However, the 2005 sample also had a greater tendency to use sunscreen, tan for special events, and use artificial tanning products (Pettijohn II et al., 2009). Overall, Pettijohn II et al.'s results suggest there was little change in how college students viewed sun-tanning despite media and government efforts to increase awareness of health risks associated with tanning.

Bagdasarov et al. (2008) examined factors predicting the use of tanning beds by college students' in relation to personality, environment, and behavior. Using three personality variables (i.e., self-esteem, sensation-seeking, and tanning image beliefs), Bagdasarov et al. concluded there was no relationship between self-esteem and tanning bed use, but there was a positive correlation between sensation-seeking and intent to use tanning beds. In addition, they also identified a strong correlation between image beliefs and the use of tanning beds. The results supported Bagdasarov et al. hypothesis showing a correlation between use of tanning beds and friends' use of tanning beds. They conclude that an individual's value of appearance is a stronger predictor of using tanning beds than health-related beliefs. Bagdasarov et al. identified college students either shy away from tanning because of health risks or consider tanning as a means to improve their appearance.

Cafri et al. (2008) studied the sociocultural influences on tanning and concluded that appearance plays a large role in an individual's decision whether or not to tan. According to Cafri et al., general appearance, acne, and body shape all influence the decision to tan, but the reasons an individual decides not to expose themselves to UV rays include immediate skin damage and skin aging. Individuals determine what is attractive based on the perceptions of

friends, family, their significant other, and the media. Participants in Cafri et al.'s study did not mention concerns about the health-related risks of tanning, but instead, they voiced concern with how society perceives them.

The Mosher et al. (2005) study examined the factors that influenced college students' desire to be perceived as attractive despite the risk of cancer (2005). Students whose social networks supported the use of sun block were more likely to protect themselves from harmful UV rays, especially on the face. Social networks place a greater influence on facial sunscreen use as compared to sunscreen use on other areas of the body. According to Mosher et al., facial appearance has been proven to influence social evaluations of attractiveness. In addition, they discovered familial support of tanned appearance leads to the use of self-tanning lotions to give the same look that UV rays might give. Romantic partner's support and support of tanned bodies by friends lead to the behavior of tanning. Thus, friends rather than family members seem to influence whether individuals put themselves at risk for cancer by tanning.

Not only do several factors such as social norms or perceptions of friends influence an individual's decisions in regard to tanning, Pettijohn II et al. (2009) affirm the desire to tan has actually increased over the past decade. Regardless of the health risks involved in tanning, students assume the rewards of tanning (i.e., being more attractive) outweigh the costs (i.e., risk of cancer). Although health risks are directly related to tanning, research indicates it is more important for college students to tan and fit in with their social networks (Cafri et al., 2009).

Most of the existing literature does not address gender differences and college students together in the influences amongst college student's decision whether or not to tan. The research supports females are more concerned with the perception of society in terms of what is viewed as attractive. For the study at hand, we suspected that gender differences among college students

would greatly influence student's decisions on whether to tan despite health related risks.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework applied to this study was the Social Exchange Theory. The Social Exchange Theory states that the outcome of human interactions is based on a cost-benefit analysis. The theory is used to explain the behaviors of individuals in regard to the exchange of rewards and costs (Della Ripa & Carrasco, 2007). That is, individuals make decisions based on how others perceive them regardless of the cost, such as time, money, or even their lives. According to the Social Exchange Theory, individuals focus on their reward, on how they appear to others, rather than the costs involved.

Applying the Social Exchange Theory to our study of male and female college students, we hypothesized that if individuals do not see themselves as beautiful, they choose to tan despite being aware of tanning-related health risks in an effort to become more attractive. The Social Exchange Theory thus predicts friends and social networks have a greater influence on the decision to tan, causing individuals to ignore the warning signs of UV exposure. Ignoring the cost of time, money, and health risks, these individuals see tanning as a reward that may positively influence other people's perceptions of them.

Purpose Statement

The question central to our research was "What are the gendered factors influencing college students' attitudes toward improving appearance or reducing health risks?" Our study's purpose was threefold: (1) to investigate potential differences in the motivations of men compared to the motivations of women that are driving the younger population to continue to put their health at risk, (2) to develop a reliable survey instrument to measure the gender differences in attitudes toward tanning, and (3) to increase the awareness of college health center

professionals to encourage young adults to place a higher value on their health rather than appearance and to increase the awareness of gendered factors influencing these individuals' attitudes toward tanning. We predicted females would be more likely than males to expose themselves to UV rays to improve their appearance while knowing the risks of cancer. In accordance with Cox et al.'s (2009) findings, we suspected females would be more likely to engage in sun-tanning behavior than men because the self-esteem of women is greater influenced by their appearance.

Method

Participants

The site of this study was at a university in northwestern Wisconsin. The participants in this study were 52 female and 40 male students.

Table 1 Participants

<i>Age</i>						
	18-19	20-21	22-23	24-25	16+	Total
Male	28	6	3	3	0	40
Female	37	9	4	0	2	52
<i>Past tanning bed use</i>						
	Yes		No		Total	
Male	4		36		40	
Female	35		17		52	
<i>How often they tan</i>						
	Never	1/Month	1/Week	2/Week	3+/Week	Total
Male	37	1	2	0	0	40
Female	23	14	6	5	4	52
<i>How often they use sunscreen</i>						
	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always	Total
Male	8	13	12	5	2	40
Female	8	11	18	13	2	52

Research Design

The purpose of survey research was to be able to sample a small population that could be used to represent a larger population of similar demographics so presumptions could be made about certain characteristics, attitudes, or behaviors of this sample of male and female college students (Babbie, 1990). The survey design type is best described as a cross-sectional survey, with data collected from a cross-section of male and female college students at one point in time. The form of data collection used was self-administered questionnaires. The rationale for this method was low cost, availability, and convenience. University undergraduate students were the population for this study; male and female students in general education classes were the sample. Purposive sampling was used to access equal numbers of both genders in the general education classes. Randomization was not used so that all students had the opportunity to complete the survey. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Data Collection Instrument

The survey included a brief description of the study, including definition of terms, implied consent, and confidentiality instructions for completing the survey. The survey consisted of five demographic questions regarding gender, age, the use of tanning beds in the past, how often the individual tans, and how often the individual uses sunscreen. Participants were given eleven closed-ended statements which were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale, measuring the intensity of the respondents' attitudes ranging from one (*strongly disagree*) to five (*strongly agree*). Questions were developed regarding individual's decisions to tan and how they based decisions on cost and reward analysis.

The questions addressed had a broad range of issues regarding the influences of tanning. Given that similar questions had been used in the 2009 study by Pettijohn II et al. to determine

the factors that influence females to tan, we did not pilot this study. Based on the previous survey, we used similar questions to determine the different factors influencing males and females' decisions on whether or not to tan.

Procedure

The data was collected from one sociology course and one psychology course. The researchers used a purposive sampling design which gave them access to general education classes with an equitable number of male and female students. Non-randomization was used in order to be inclusive in the classroom. The researchers left the room while the participants completed the surveys. The psychology class followed the same procedure as the sociology class. Over sampling was done to ensure that the target sample number was met in case of missing data from any surveys.

Data Analysis Plan

The data was cleaned and checked for any statements left blank and/or any irrelevant information. The cleaned surveys were then coded using acronyms for each variable. The study used only one independent variable: *Gender* (GEN). Each survey statement was a dependent variable and given an acronym: *My friends encourage me to tan* (IFL); *My friends compliment my tan* (COM); *I look more attractive with a suntan than without a suntan* (APR); *It is important for my boyfriend/girlfriend to have a suntan* (PRF); *Suntanned individuals are more attractive than those without suntans* (ATR); *Suntanned individuals are more successful than those without suntans* (SUC); *Suntanned individuals are healthier than individuals without suntans* (HLT); *Women engage in sun-tanning behavior more frequently than men* (FRQ); *Being tan now is more important to me than the risk of skin cancer in the future* (IMP); *I am concerned about getting skin cancer from exposure to UV rays* (RSK); *I am aware of the risks involved with UV exposure*

(AWN).

The data-analyzing computer program called the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. The level of analysis in this study was the individual. Being that groups were compared based on gender, data analysis included frequencies, cross-tabulations, independent t-tests, and mean comparisons. A Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis was also conducted.

Results

All of the variables were subjected to frequency distribution analysis. Results indicated there was no missing data. Cross-tabulations were run with the independent variable, GEN. For IFL, PRF, SUC, HLT, and IMP, there appeared to be no difference between groups with both males and females having disagreed and/or strongly disagreed. For ATR, FRQ, and AWN, there appeared to be no difference between groups with both males and females having agreed and/or strongly agreed. For APR, there appeared to be difference between groups with the majority of males having undecided responses and the majority of females have agreed and/or strongly agreed. For COM and RSK, there appeared to be a difference between groups with the majority of males having disagreed and/or strongly disagreed and females having agreed and/or strongly agreed.

Table 2 Cross-Tabulations

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	80.0%	15.0%	5.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Female	40.4%	38.5%	19.2%	1.9%	0.0%	100.0%

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	60.0%	12.5%	10.0%	17.5%	0.0%	100.0%
Female	28.8%	7.7%	9.6%	40.4%	13.5%	100.0%

APR

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	22.5%	0.0%	37.5%	27.5%	12.5%	100.0%
Female	7.7%	5.8%	13.5%	38.5%	34.6%	100.0%

PRF

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	45.0%	22.5%	22.5%	5.0%	5.0%	100.0%
Female	57.7%	26.9%	15.4%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%

ATR

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	22.5%	15.0%	30.0%	22.5%	10.0%	100.0%
Female	11.5%	36.5%	23.1%	17.3%	11.5%	100.0%

SUC

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	70.0%	5.0%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Female	61.5%	25.0%	13.5%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%

HLT

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	57.5%	12.5%	27.5%	2.5%	0.0%	100.0%
Female	59.6%	23.1%	13.5%	1.9%	1.9%	100.0%

FRQ

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	2.5%	0.0%	7.5%	35.0%	55.0%	100.0%
Female	1.9%	1.9%	7.7%	50.0%	38.5%	100.0%

IMP

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	65.0%	17.5%	12.5%	5.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Female	50.0%	23.1%	19.2%	7.7%	0.0%	100.0%

RSK

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	32.5%	30.0%	22.5%	7.5%	7.5%	100.0%
Female	5.8%	15.4%	26.9%	38.5%	13.5%	100.0%

AWN

GEN	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
Male	2.5%	5.0%	5.0%	50.0%	37.5%	100.0%
Female	0.0%	0.0%	7.7%	44.2%	48.1%	100.0%

Note. (GEN)=Gender of participant; (IFL)=My friends encourage me to tan; (COM)=My friends compliment my tan; (APR)=I look more attractive with a suntan than without a suntan; (PRF)=It is important for my boyfriend/girlfriend to have a suntan; (ATR)=Suntanned individuals are more attractive than those without suntans; (SUC)=Suntanned individuals are more successful than those without suntans; (HLT)=Suntanned individuals are healthier than individuals without suntans; (FRQ)=Women engage in sun tanning behavior more frequently than men; (IMP)=Being tan now is more important to me than the risk of skin cancer in the future; (RSK)=I am concerned about getting skin cancer from exposure to UV rays; (AWN)=I am aware of the risks involved with UV exposure.

Table 3

Compare Means

<u>GEN</u>	<u>IFL</u>	<u>COM</u>	<u>APR</u>	<u>PRF</u>	<u>ATR</u>
Male:					
Mean:	1.25	1.85	3.08	2.03	2.83
SD:	0.54	1.19	1.31	1.17	1.30
Range:	2.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Female:					
Mean:	1.83	3.02	3.87	1.58	2.81
SD:	0.81	1.49	1.19	0.75	1.21
Range:	3.00	4.00	4.00	2.00	4.00

Compare Means

<u>GEN</u>	<u>SUC</u>	<u>HLT</u>	<u>FRQ</u>	<u>IMP</u>	<u>RSK</u>	<u>AWN</u>
Male:						
Mean:	1.55	1.75	4.83	1.58	2.28	4.15
SD:	0.88	0.95	0.38	0.90	1.22	.921
Range:	2.00	3.00	1.00	3.00	4.00	4.00
Female:						
Mean:	1.52	1.63	4.25	1.85	3.38	4.40
SD:	0.73	0.93	0.86	1.00	1.09	0.63
Range:	2.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	2.00

Note. (GEN)=Gender of participant; (IFL)=My friends encourage me to tan; (COM)=My friends

compliment my tan; (APR)=I look more attractive with a suntan than without a suntan; (PRF)=It is important for my boyfriend/girlfriend to have a suntan; (ATR)=Suntanned individuals are more attractive than those without suntans; (SUC)=Suntanned individuals are more successful than those without suntans; (HLT)=Suntanned individuals are healthier than individuals without suntans; (FRQ)=Women engage in sun tanning behavior more frequently than men; (IMP)=Being tan now is more important to me than the risk of skin cancer in the future; (RSK)=I am concerned about getting skin cancer from exposure to UV rays; (AWN)=I am aware of the risks involved with UV exposure.

An independent samples t-test was run to compare mean scores for males and females.

There were five statistically significant mean differences between genders for the variables IFL, COM, APR, PRF, and RSK.

Table 4

Independent T-tests

Variable	Gender		t	df	Sig.
	Males	Females			
IFL	1.250 (.543)	1.827 (.810)	-4.081	88.505	**0.000
COM	1.850 (1.189)	3.019 (1.488)	-4.189	89.854	**0.000
APR	3.075 (1.309)	3.865 (1.189)	-3.026	90	**0.003
PRF	2.025 (1.165)	1.577 (0.750)		62.925	*0.038
RSK	2.275 (1.219)	3.385 (1.087)	2.177 -4.602	90	**0.000

Note. (IFL)=My friends encourage me to tan; (COM)=My friends compliment my tan; (APR)=I look more attractive with a suntan than without a suntan; (PRF)=It is important for my boyfriend/girlfriend to have a suntan; (RSK)=I am concerned about getting skin cancer from

exposure to UV rays. *significant @ $p \leq .05$, **significant @ $p \leq .01$, two tailed. Standard deviations appear in parentheses below means.

A reliability analysis was run to determine whether the variables were a reliable index to measure the major concept, the gendered factors that influence college students' attitudes toward tanning to increase appearance or reduce health risk. Cronbach's Alpha is a measure of reliability and was 0.636. This value indicates that survey items were a reliable measure of the major concept.

Discussion

The hypothesis that females engage in tanning more frequently than males to improve their appearance in spite of awareness of health risks was supported by the data in variables FRQ and AWN. Frequency results indicated strong support that females tanned more frequently than males to improve their appearance.

Statistically significant correlations ($p < 0.01$ level) were found between several of the variables. There were significant correlations between variables relating to the appearance of the individual and their decision whether or not to tan. Mosher and Danoff-Burg (2005) concluded individuals whose family and friends tanned or complimented their tan were more likely to engage in tanning. We also found a correlation between an individual's desire to tan and knowing the health risks involved.

Ninety-five percent of the surveyed males and 80% of the surveyed females disagreed and/or strongly disagreed that their friends encouraged them to tan. In contrast to this result, Bagdasarov et al. (2008) and Mosher et al. (2005) suggest if individuals' close friends and families perceive tanned bodies as more attractive than individuals are more likely to engage in tanning. In the present study, participants' qualitative responses contradicted the survey results,

since many responses commented, “My friends would think it is dumb.”

Other qualitative comments, supporting the claim *My friends encourage me to tan*, included “The people I like influence my decision to tan”; “I wanted to look more tan because it was the ‘popular’ thing to do”; “My friends influence me because they do it and sometimes we go tan together”; “My friends and the media—fashion magazines always show tan people which makes me want to get a better tan.” Given these qualitative comments and considering Social Exchange Theory, college students not only tan to feel more accepted, but they believe tanning is worth the risk to be more “popular” in school.

Seventy-two percent of male college students as opposed to 36% of females disagreed or strongly disagreed that their friends compliment their tan. Mosher et al. (2005) suggests compliments toward females from friends and family support their decision to tan. We suspect males on the other hand are less likely to admit getting a compliment for a tan because it is not masculine; that is, if a male compliments another male’s tan both males may be seen as effeminate. In fact, in response to one of the survey questions asking, “Who or what is your biggest influence on whether to tan or not to tan?,” one male participant responded with “I’m not that self-conscious.” This response suggests that the participant believes he does not have the self-conscious mindset of females in regard to appearance and how others may perceive his physical attributes. In today’s society, a man’s self-consciousness and concern with his appearance may be considered as more feminine behaviors.

Thirty-seven percent of male college students were undecided when asked if they look more attractive with a suntan. This number may be due to males’ refusal to label themselves as attractive because doing so is often seen as not masculine. However, 73% of females either agreed or strongly agreed they look more attractive with a suntan. This shows strong support in

the survey statement “An individual looks more attractive with a suntan rather than without one.” We found females are more willing to tan to improve their appearance. Considering the Social Exchange Theory, this means females are willing to tan to be more attractive at the expense of increasing their chances of developing skin cancer.

A few male participants commented that the specific reasons that influence their decision not to tan were “I’m a male, therefore, looks don’t bother me”; “I’m a guy and I feel I shouldn’t tan”; and “I don’t tan because I feel I am already good looking.” At the same time, a majority of female college students responded that specific reasons they chose to tan was because they wanted to feel better about themselves, and they wanted to have a tanned “glow.” A connection between females’ self-esteem and their decision on whether to tan or not to tan may also be explained by Bagdasarov et al.’s (2008) assertion in which people with lower levels of self-esteem are more likely to engage in risky behaviors. Indeed, one female participant commented that one of the biggest reasons she tanned was for self confidence. She wrote, “When you feel better about yourself you often can present yourself in a different light, being more outgoing, etc. Many other things can influence self confidence other than tanning as well such as hair, nails, and working out.”

Based on the qualitative comments we found people want to feel good about themselves. Feeling good about oneself comes from having positive self-esteem as a reflection of one’s body. Since the research has suggested that tanning can improve appearance, this may be an option for an individual to feel good about themselves. Tanning packages are very affordable allowing for an easy way to gain confidence. It is evident that this individual, along with many others, engaged in sun-tanning behavior for the desired result of being more confident and to increase her self-esteem. The males’ responses indicated their level of self-esteem is much higher than

that of the female participants. With higher levels of self-esteem, an individual will feel better about his/her body and therefore, engage in sun-tanning behavior to improve his/her appearance less.

Approximately 68% of males and 75% of females either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that they prefer their partners to be tan. However, this finding contrasts what Mosher and Danoff-Burg (2005) concluded about the influence of an individual's partner on tanning behaviors. Their study's results suggest when the significant other engages in tanning behavior, individuals are more likely to engage in tanning behavior themselves.

Although the majority of males and females disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "It is important for my boyfriend/girlfriend to have a suntan," some participants commented on the influence of their partners on their own tanning behavior. For example, one female participant stated that her boyfriend was her biggest influence on why she tanned because she "wants to look good for him." Similarly, a male participant indicated that his biggest influence on whether or not to tan was his "girlfriend, because she tans once a week." These types of answers highlight the different social factors that may impact a person's decision on whether or not to tan. In the case of the significant other, for example, we discovered that college students whose partners feel they are more attractive with a tan are more likely to tan in order to look good for their partner.

Considering that there seems to be a connection between an individual's tanning behavior and how partners or close family members perceive tanning, the Social Exchange Theory suggests that individuals base their decision whether to tan on the responses received by those people close to them. People are also more likely to tan when their partners tan or support their tan. The Social Exchange Theory suggests that the reactions we get from a certain behavior will

determine our desire to continue that behavior. In terms of this specific statement, those who have a reason for tanning and have partners that influence this behavior are more likely to continue this behavior.

Sixty-two percent of male students and about 21% of females disagreed and/or strongly disagreed that they are concerned about getting skin cancer from exposure to UV rays. Almost every participant, both male and female, was aware of the risks that are associated with UV exposure; however, females were more likely to express their concern for getting skin cancer. This result is somewhat surprising considering the number of female participants who tan (67%) and the number of male participants who do not tan (90%). Indeed, participants' responses suggest that females are more concerned about getting skin cancer from the exposure to UV rays. Females may be more concerned about health-related dangers of tanning because statistically females tan more frequently than males. Male respondents on the other hand may have either disagreed or strongly disagreed because they typically do not tan. Moreover, one reason why males are not concerned about getting skin cancer may be that admitting such concerns would be seen as unmanly.

A majority of college students, both male and female, either disagreed or strongly disagreed that sun-tanned individuals are more successful than those without suntans and that sun-tanned individuals are healthier than those without suntans. Individuals could have perceived looking healthy as looking pale or they could have seen looking healthy as having a natural looking glow, with the help of UV rays. Looking healthy depends on the individual's perception of healthy. These findings also imply that individuals do not view success in accordance with the way an individual is perceived.

A majority of college students, both male and female, were undecided if sun-tanned

individuals are more attractive than those without a suntan. Despite our findings, Cox et al. (2009) claim females especially believe they are more attractive with a suntan and that tanned skin is often perceived as attractive. One reason for this result may be that individuals do not want to acknowledge appearance matters, or they may not want to disclose whether people with suntans are perceived as more attractive.

A majority of college students disagreed and/or strongly disagreed that being tan now is more important than the risk of cancer in the future. This contradicts Cox et al.'s (2009) findings in which they assert that college students are usually not concerned about risks of cancer. Furthermore, college students are also more motivated to live up to cultural standards and willing to compromise their health (Cox et al., 2009). In light of Cox et al.'s results, we suspect that participants may have disagreed and/or strongly disagreed that being tan now is more important than the risk of cancer in the future because it is human nature to not want cancer. Respondents clearly preferred to not be exposed to cancer; at the same time though, some respondents preferred tanning while disregarding the risk at hand.

Several central themes emerged from the analysis of qualitative comments. For one, appearance is a major factor in an individual's decision on whether or not to tan. Factors influencing an individual's decision to tan are determined by what is perceived as attractive by society at large (Cafri et al., 2009). The majority of participants' comments in the study at hand expressed similar factors. Respondents indicated they either have tanned or do tan on a regular basis because they believe they look better with a tan, feel more confident, want a healthy glow, or want to clear acne. Participants who chose not to tan made comments such as "I do not want to get wrinkly faster and turning orange is very unattractive" and "I don't tan because I freckle and freckles look horrible on me."

Limitations

The major limitations to this study are the nonrandom design and small sample size. For those questions with a high number of undecided responses, using a seven-point or even a ten-point Likert scale could have provided more variation. In addition, having a larger sample size could have increased diversity.

Implications for Practitioners

The data demonstrates that appearance and friends are two major factors that influence an individual's decision to tan or not. More education describing the importance of protecting skin from harmful UV rays should be distributed in middle and high school health education classes given the fact that at these particular ages peers have a strong influence on decisions individuals make. Doing so would allow early education on the harmful effects of sun exposure.

Most college students are aware of the risks of UV rays, but are not concerned at this point in their lives about getting skin cancer. Given that females tan to improve their appearance, it might be beneficial to focus on the appearance-related reasons of why one should not tan, such as skin damage and skin aging.

Implications for Future Research

There are several implications for future research. First, it is recommended that future research should include a random, large sample in order to generalize the findings nationwide. Furthermore, in order to increase the variability on the scale, researchers should use a seven-point Likert scale, rather than a five-point.

Should the same survey be used again, additional questions or statements should be added. For example, asking participants who have tanned if they did so because of an upcoming occasion, since qualitative comments indicated that many participants tanned only for special

occasions such as weddings, prom, and vacations.

Additionally, it may be beneficial to use several different study designs. A comparison between groups who tan and groups who do not tan, for example, could provide results that may help differentiate between factors that may influence tanning behavior. Moreover, a longitudinal study, surveying participants every ten years beginning at the college age may yield valuable results, such as different factors that influenced their decisions to tan or not to tan. Given that society is always changing, such a longitudinal study could provide insight on changing perceptions as individuals become more concerned with their health.

Conclusion

Previous studies indicate skin cancer is a growing risk among college-aged students. This research at hand has been backed up with previous research suggesting that females are more likely than males to tan to improve appearance. Although our results show a large majority of participants are aware of the health risks involved in tanning, many continue to expose themselves to harmful UV rays. At this point in time, many of the participants are not as concerned with the risk of cancer. During college, both males and females often explore new romantic relationships, so feeling more confident by having a tanned body seems to outweigh future health-related risks.

Moreover, because it is important for many young adults, especially college students, to feel like they fit in with a group, many are willing to take risks such as tanning; even though there may be a concern for the risk of future skin cancer, individuals like the participants of our study believe it is more important to be socially accepted. Throughout this research, we found individuals are willing to compromise their health in order to be more socially accepted. The findings suggest females are more likely to tan because tanning is portrayed as more acceptable

for females, motivating females to engage in tanning more frequently. Females are also tanning because their friends, family, and romantic partners influence this decision; males on the other hand are less likely to engage in this behavior because their friends and family do not encourage this behavior. Nevertheless, increasing support for healthy bodies rather than tanned bodies can influence an individual to make better lifelong decisions.

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