



Creating a tanned body with or without a U.V risk and its implication to behavioral alternatives
and body stigmatization

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Significance. Body-tanning is identified as a risky, but popular, method to enhance physical appearance. It is found that individuals who engage in certain risky, image-enhancing behaviors are more likely to engage in other risky behaviors, as well (Biglan & Cody, 2003). For this reason, there must be factors interacting with risky appearance management behaviors and the decision to use high risk vs. low risk tanning methods. In particular, commonly stigmatized behaviors such as tattooing or piercing, often associated with low socioeconomic groups, may be significantly higher among tanners who risk skin cancer. Therefore, it is conceptualized that appearance management behaviors differ among those who tan with UV exposure risk and those who tan without UV exposure risk. An accurate understanding of UV-induced tanning behavior in relation to other stigmatized behaviors will be an important tool in correcting the idealized images of tanners in our society. The goal of this study is to understand the relationship between college students' engagement of tanning methods and risky appearance management behaviors, and to stigmatize unhealthy behaviors.

Theoretical perspective. Goffman's concept of stigmatization may be applied to understand the linkage between tanning and other risky behaviors. Goffman (1963) described "stigma" as a social attribute that becomes the basis of social rejection. Individuals who experience "rejection" are more likely to be compelled to engage in behaviors to minimize exposure to stigmatization in social interactions. For instance, the motivation to reduce visibility of a physical stigma may result in tanned skin. This action, however, may result in an entirely new stigma. When associated with negative stereotypes and demographic subgroups, the outcome of having done risky body modifications can create a stigma towards the individual (Wohlrab, Stahl, Rammsayer, & Kappeler, 2007). Despite the popularity of tattooing, cosmetic surgery, and tanning, all three serve as examples of how social and cultural stigmas may be attached to those who engage in these behaviors. This all further supports the claim that the varying risk in different methods of tanning may otherwise negotiate cultural constraints that are reinforced through the stigmatization of body modification.

Methods. Participants were 281 female college students who were contacted by a web link to the survey online, and were asked for their permission to participate. The majority of the participants were Caucasian (79.3%; $n = 208$), followed by African American (9.1%; $n = 32$), Asian (5.4%; $n = 19$), multiracial (3.7%; $n = 13$), and Hispanic Americans (2.5%; $n = 9$). A preliminary analysis revealed that the average age of the respondents was 20.5 years old. The first part of the questionnaire contained participants' engagement in UV-induced tanning (sunbathing, tanning bed) and non-UV-induced tanning (tanning spray and lotions). The second part of the questionnaire contained the items concerning their behavioral intention for the various types of appearance management behaviors. Appearance management behaviors are categorized as following in this study: risky weight management behaviors (diet pill, purging, laxatives,

diuretics), plastic surgery (liposuction, Botox, rhinoplasty), body decoration (tattoo, piercing), and spa treatment (wax, gel nail polish). The participants who scored higher than the median were categorized as “frequent” tanners and those who scored lower than the median were categorized as ‘infrequent’ tanners for each UV-induced and non-UV-induced tanning method. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and an ANOVA to compare the behavioral intentions of risky appearance management behaviors between the frequent and infrequent tanning groups.

Results. Individuals who are frequent UV-induced tanners have significantly higher behavioral intentions to engage in risky weight management behaviors ($f = 7.75, p < 0.00$), plastic surgeries ($f = 5.52, p < 0.05$), stigmatized body modification ($f = 8.12, p < 0.00$), and spa treatments ($f = 14.08, p < 0.00$). This suggests that body-tanners who are highly motivated to expose and risk themselves to UV radiation would take a greater willingness to engage in all types of appearance management behaviors investigated in this study. Similarly, individuals who are frequent non-UV-induced tanners have significantly higher behavioral intention to engage in risky weight management behaviors ($f = 11.02, p < 0.00$), cosmetic surgeries ($f = 11.62, p < 0.01$), and spa treatment ($f = 19.32, p < 0.00$), but behavioral intention to engage in stigmatized body modification ($f = 8.12, p < 0.00$) has not been found to be significant. This suggests that the individuals who are motivated to tan with a safer alternative to skin cancer are less willing to take a risk of engaging in behaviors associated with social stigma.

Discussion and Conclusion. It is interesting to note that while safer tanners are invested in their appearance, they are more concerned with the visibility of certain behavioral outcomes that connect with negative stereotypes. In separating individuals into groups on the basis of tanning means (safe vs. unsafe), they exhibit differences in the stigmatized body modifications such as having tattoos or piercings. The degree to which individuals take risks can account for how they are expected to behave to accomplish ideal appearance. According to the findings of this study, public education can develop safe sun practices by incorporating stigmatized images of tanned individuals and negative stereotypes associated with it for the general public to avoid. To date, a majority of the skin cancer prevention campaign has emphasized avoidance of getting sunburned and reducing UV exposure, both of which neglect the individual’s experience with social concerns. Public education regarding healthy body-tanning behaviors can be effectively accomplished if an emphasis is placed on visual stigma surrounding tanned individuals. This allows for a cultural shift in tanning behaviors among the young adult population.

Reference

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