

The Impact of Appearance on Memory and Perception

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Introduction

The overall fashion in college students today displays an effortless and very casual look—the messier their hair, the more layers of clothing and the more unlaced their shoes the better. Ironically, college students are preparing to become professionals, yet their attire would say otherwise. Realistically, appearance, as well as other characteristics, will change when transitioning from a college graduate to a professional in the work force. The purpose of this study was to see if college students perceived a woman dressed professionally differed from the same woman dressed effortlessly, or sloppy.

Eighty-one percent agree that personal appearance is highly valued (Easterling, C. R., Leslie, J. E., & Jones, M. A. 1992) Men were significantly more likely to lend a dime to a neatly dressed woman, compared to a sloppy dressed woman (Kleinke, C. L. 1977) Participants were more likely to express physical, social, sexual, and psychological issues with a doctor who is dressed professionally (Rehman, S. U., Nietert, P. J., Cope, D. W., & Kilpatrick, A. O. 2005)

In addition to the Big Five, we added five questions focused on professionalism. We measured participants' memory by asking them to list as many characteristics after the photo was removed. We predicted the more professionally dressed photo would be perceived as more dependable, conventional, successful, trust worthy and timely, as well as memorable in comparison to the casually dressed photo.

Professional
v.
Casual



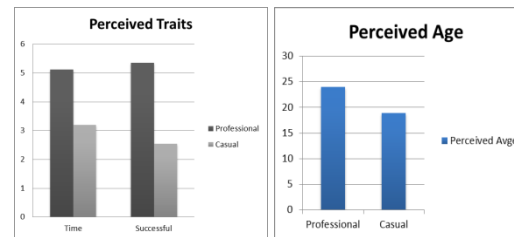
Participants

These participants were randomly assigned and conveniently selected males and females (14 males and 38 females) ranging from the ages of 17 to 32. The mean age of participants was 20.73 (SD= 3.52).

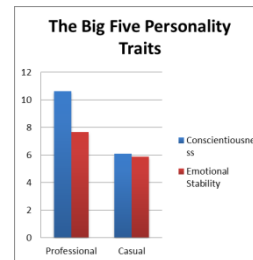
Results

An independent *t* test with alpha set at .05 was used to determine if there was a difference in the perception of timeliness between the professionally dressed photo and the casually dressed photo. Results suggested that there was a difference between the perceptions of timeliness, $t(50) = 5.831, p = .000$.

Research suggested there was a difference in the perception of how successful the person in the picture was. Results suggested that there was a difference in the perception of successfulness, $t(50) = 9.066, p = .000$.

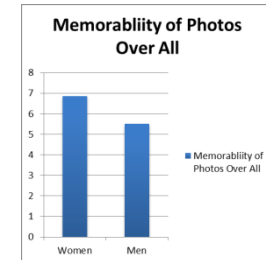


There was a difference in the perceived age of the person dressed professionally and the person dressed casually. Results suggested there was a difference in the perception of age, $t(50) = 1.337, p = .000$.



The data suggested that there was a difference in the perceived conscientiousness of the person dressed professionally and the person dressed casually. Results suggested that there was a difference in the perception of conscientiousness, $t(50) = 7.260, p = .000$.

A two-way ANOVA suggested there was a difference in the perceived emotional stability of the person dressed professionally and the person dressed casually. Results suggested that there was a difference in the perception of emotional stability, $t(50) = 2.784, p = 0.008$.



Conclusions

It was statistically suggested that there was a difference in the memorability of the photos between men and women. Results suggested that women remembered more characteristics from the photo than men, $t(50) = 2.168, p = .035$.

These results highlight a disturbing trend emerging in obesity research. While non-white college students have higher BMI, they perceive their weight as lower than it actually is, and are less likely to exercise to lose weight. Studies of interventions aimed at long term weight loss show the difficulty of maintaining long term weight loss, and that exercise can increase sustained weight loss as much as 20% (Curioni & Lourenco, 2005). Non-white participants did not report a desire to lose weight or an active effort to lose weight at greater levels than the thinner white control group. Those non-white participants actively trying to lose weight tended to use diet but not exercise which is less effective than diet and exercise together. Future interventions must focus on raising the exercise levels of at-risk populations.

References

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