

The Influence of Physical Attractiveness and Manner of Dress on Success in a Simulated Personnel Decision

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PHYSICALLY ATTRACTIVE PEOPLE are perceived as having more positive traits than are less attractive people (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977), and this often affects how these people are treated by others. Another aspect of attractiveness is how well dressed a person is. Previous studies have not manipulated physical attractiveness and manner of dress in the same experiment. Hence, it is not clear how much weight this component of attractiveness carries. The intent of the present experiment was to determine what happens when the attractiveness or appropriateness of clothing conflicts with other aspects of physical attractiveness and to find out if men and women respond differently to this lack of congruity.

The design was a $3 \times 2 \times 2$ randomized factorial, with the physical attractiveness of a stimulus person (high, average, low), the type of clothing worn by the stimulus person (appropriate or not appropriate for a job interview), and the sex of the subject as the independent variables. The stimulus persons were three female students at a small liberal arts college who were selected from a pool of 40 women who had been rated on physical attractiveness by 76 students from a nearby state university. They were selected because their mean scores on these evaluations clearly indicated that they were high, average, and low on physical attractiveness. Each stimulus person was then photographed twice, once while dressed appropriately for a job interview and once while dressed inappropriately. These photographs were made into six color slides, representing each of the combinations of attractiveness and style of dress.

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Subjects were 226 volunteers (119 men, 107 women) from introductory psychology classes at Western Illinois University. Subjects reported to one of six experimental sessions for a study on "how people are evaluated for jobs." All subjects received identical resumes and questionnaires and viewed one of the six slides. They received tape-recorded instructions instructing them to examine the resume of the person shown on the slide, rate the person on a series of bipolar adjectives, and decide whether the person should be hired for an entry-level management position with a large corporation.

The results indicated that physical attractiveness and appropriateness of clothing independently influenced the decision about whether the person should be hired, with physical attractiveness being weighted much more heavily. Generally, the attractive stimulus person was hired significantly more often than was the unattractive one, $\chi^2(1) = 10.87, p < .01$, with the average stimulus person falling between the two. The appropriately dressed person was hired more often than was the inappropriately dressed person, $\chi^2(1) = 5.02, p < .05$.

Although the unattractive person who dressed well only slightly increased her chance of being hired (from 68% to 76%), the attractive person gained more by dressing appropriately (from 82% to 100%). Thus, the appropriately dressed attractive stimulus person would have been hired significantly more often than the appropriately dressed stimulus person who was less attractive, $\chi^2(1) = 7.33, p < .01$. Even when the attractive stimulus person was not dressed appropriately, she would have been hired more often than the unattractive stimulus person who did dress correctly (82% vs. 76%), although this difference was not statistically significant.

A Fisher's test revealed that the only nearly significant sex difference occurred when women were especially hard on the unattractive stimulus person who did not dress well. Only 58% said that they would hire her, whereas 80% of the men said that they would ($p < .06$). Men and women were highly similar on all other evaluations. Although physical attractiveness and appropriateness of dress independently influenced the decision about whether the stimulus person should be hired and, of the two variables, physical attractiveness undoubtedly exerted the strongest influence, the generalizability of the study is limited because it was based on one set of photographs and employed college students as subjects.

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