

When Attractiveness Meets Stereotypes— Variables Influencing Perceptions of People’s Ethos and Credibility in the Workforce



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ABSTRACT

The study predicted that perceived physical appearance (high or low attractiveness) and job stereotyping (matched or not matched) would interact to affect perceived credibility, such that attractiveness and matched job stereotyped individuals would be perceived as credible, whereas unattractive and unmatched job stereotyped individuals would not be perceived as credible. A total of 118 participants were exposed to one of four photographs of the same woman in which her attractiveness and appearance to match a job stereotype were manipulated. Participants then completed a series of items to measure perceived credibility (competence, goodwill, and trustworthiness). Results did not support the predicted hypothesis. However, results found a main effect for attractiveness and job stereotyping on perceived competence.

Physical appearance plays an important role in society. For example, people’s perception of others’ competence, ethos (McCroskey and Young 1981), and goodwill (McCroskey and Teven 1999) is influenced by the attractiveness of others. The phenomenon of using attractiveness as an estimate of another’s abilities is especially true in the workforce, where it has been found to be an important predictor of perceived professionalism and the ability to complete work-related tasks (Dion, Berscheid, and Walster 1972).

Scholars and researchers, predominantly in the field of social psychology, have explored how physical appearance affects the perception and perhaps even the decision-making process of managers, supervisors, and subordinates in employment settings (Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske, and Yzerbyt 2000). Two of the most important factors influencing people’s perception of the capability of others in the workforce are individuals’ physical attractiveness and the extent to which they appear to belong to a group associated with stereotypes of professions in question.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research suggests that physical attractiveness is not a subjective perception, but that it adheres to measurable attributes and characteristics such as facial symmetry and proportions, as well as the development and expression of facial traits regarding size and shape (Jefferson 2004; Grammer and Thornhill 1994; Cunningham 1986; Cunningham, Barbee and Pike 1990). This research maintains that an objective description of perceived physical attractiveness becomes significant when placed in context with various attributes associated with beauty. If physical attractiveness is inherently associated with favorable skills, attributes and characteristics, a permanent, yet unreasonable advantage is given to a person with the attractive features.

The findings of Dion, Berscheid and Walster (1972), suggest that physically attractive people are perceived to have more favorable traits. This study became the basis of a body of work to which many scholars have contributed. The vast majority of research around the effects of physical appearance resulted in support of the idea of the “beauty-is-good” stereotype. Some exceptions and mediating variables have been discovered by other researchers during the discourse of applying Dion, Berscheid and Walster’s famous theory (Ashmore, Eagly, Longo and Makhijani 1991; Dipoye, Arvey and Terpstra 1977; Beehr and Gilmore 1982), however, there is a tendency to associate attractive individuals with positive attributes and below average individuals with unfavorable attributes (Griffin and Langlois 2006; Downs and Harrison 1985). Generally speaking, the previously referenced literature supports the notion that beauty is associated with positive traits, the lack of beauty with negative traits.

Placed in the context of the workforce, research has shown that the attractiveness of an employee (or potential employee in the form of a job candidate) has a significant impact on the perceptions of (hiring) managers and coworkers (Tews, Stafford and Zhu 2009; Desrumaux, DeBosscher and Leoni 2009). The literature reveals that a large body of research has been dedicated to explaining under which circumstances attractiveness factors into the perception of job-related skills and competence. Even though there are mixed results amongst some research findings and there is a need for additional exploration, it can be concluded that there is a consensus amongst scholars that physical attractiveness influences the perception of individuals in the workforce.

Biases Based on Stereotypes in the Workforce

When examining the research on stereotypes in the workforce, it is important to clarify how preconceived notions about a group of people factor contextually into the hiring process and general assessment of professional

performance and competence. Where attractiveness is directly related to perceived positive attributes, stereotypes are dependent on the field of profession with which they are associated. Therefore, a stereotype cannot be determined as hindering or helpful without being placed in context with a particular profession. Where it may be possible to argue that high levels of physical attractiveness likely result in specific advantages, researchers cannot predict if belonging to a certain stereotyped group is beneficial without knowing if the stereotypical characteristics of a person are positive, in relation to the job. A woman, for instance, may benefit from being (sex) stereotyped when seeking employment for a position that is predominantly held by female employees, but may have to face discrimination when attempting to gain access into a male-dominated field, and may even accept notions of sex segregation of jobs and associated stereotypes (Miller and Rowena 2006).

The research also suggests that even adolescents and people who are just about to enter the workforce have manifested certain stereotypical notions intrinsically. Many studies have uncovered clear biases, motivated by stereotypes, especially those that are held by hiring managers (Guinote and Philips 2010; Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske and Yzerbyt 2000).

The literature suggests that individuals in the workforce stereotype particular groups to assess competence based on physical appearance (assigning the individual to a group with favorable or unfavorable traits) when evaluating or judging skills, performance or qualifications. Adding to the literature examining the relationship of mobility, discrimination, exclusion and expulsion in the workforce, Garcia and Bobbitt-Zeher (2007) used a qualitative analysis as a complementary study to the more common use of a cause-and-effect model to gain insights into this topic. They explored the factors of race and sex by analyzing discrimination cases filed in Ohio between 1988 and 2003. Similarly, Marlowe, Schneider and Nelson (1996) examined the variables of sex and attractiveness in order to determine their effect on suitability for hiring and probable organizational progression. The findings revealed a bias towards favoring the more attractive candidates as well as preferring male candidates to female candidates. The findings also indicated that even though these differences may have been more subtle, being good looking and male gave competitors having one or both of these traits (such as perceived credibility) an edge over other candidates with equal qualifications.

An oft-used foundation of research on credibility uses McCroskey and Teven's definition and measurement scale of ethos and credibility to assess participants' perception regarding the professional qualities, capabilities

and general job performance skills. McCroskey and Young (1981) reviewed research that has been conducted over the course of 30 years that examined the definition and measurement of ethos and credibility. In 2000, Teven and McCroskey released a study justifying the use of the dimension of goodwill as part of the measurement for ethos and credibility after some controversy was claimed that goodwill as a dimension is too elusive and cannot be used as a tool due to difficulties operationalizing its definition. Teven and McCroskey (2000) concluded in their study that the previously conducted analysis of the factor analytic research (conducted by McCroskey and Young in 1981) was correct and that the two dimensions of competence and trustworthiness were successfully developed as reliable instruments for measuring credibility in addition to the dimension of goodwill, which is concerned with characteristics of the individual. Since Teven and McCroskey convincingly argue that ethos and credibility are a multidimensional construct, and that the scales produced reliable results, the measurements were used for this study (Teven and McCroskey 1996).

This scientific credibility instrument consists of three dimensions with six items each. The first dimension of the Teven and McCroskey scale is “competence,” with six semantic differential type items, including intelligent/unintelligent, trained/untrained, expert/inexpert, informed/uninformed, competent/incompetent, and bright/stupid.

The second dimension focuses on what Teven and McCroskey (1996) defined as “goodwill,” which focuses on the general, perceived ethos of the subject in the picture. The six semantic differential items that measure goodwill include: has my interest at heart/does not have my interest at heart; cares about me/does not care about me; self-centered/non self-centered; concerned with me/unconcerned with me; sensitive/insensitive; and understanding/not understanding.

The third dimension is defined as “trustworthiness,” featuring the six items of honest/dishonest; trustworthy/untrustworthy; honorable/dishonorable; moral/immoral; ethical/unethical; and genuine/phony.

HYPOTHESIS

The literature on physical attractiveness and stereotyping clearly shows a pattern of scholarly interest in investigating the effects that these forces have on the perception of people active in the workforce. While uncovering the circumstances under which the prevalence of attractiveness or stereotypes are reliable indicators for favorable perception, scholars have yet to determine whether there is an advantage when an individual is both attractive and positively stereotyped for a specific job position. The purpose

of the present study was to investigate if the variables of attractiveness and matching the stereotype combined enhance people's positive perception of an individual's competence, as well as to examine if stereotypes or physical attractiveness differentially impact the perceptions of others. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed: Physical attractiveness (high and low) and stereotyping of a job (matched or unmatched) interact to impact perceived credibility (competence, goodwill, and trustworthiness). Specifically, individuals who are physically attractive and positively job stereotyped will be perceived as most credible, whereas physically unattractive and negatively job stereotyped individuals will be perceived as least credible.

METHODOLOGY

The experiment followed a 2 x 2 design with physical appearance (high and low attractiveness) and matching the stereotype of a profession (matching and not matching) as the independent variables. The dependent variable was the perception of competence in accordance with the definition of Teven and McCroskey's measure of credibility. The study was conducted in two stages. First, the researcher performed a manipulation check to examine the ability of the experimental stimuli to induce the intended effects. Upon successfully creating stimuli that induced perceptions of physical attractiveness and perceived job stereotyping, the main experiment was conducted to ascertain the effect of these variables on perceived credibility.

Manipulation Check

The manipulation check included 60 participants not used in the experiment. The sample consisted of students between the age of 18 and 61, with a mean of 26.5 ($SD = 6.80$), who attended a public West Coast university. This group consisted of 28 males (46.7%) and 32 females (53.3%), of which 24 (40%) identified themselves as Caucasian; 5 (8.3%) as African American; 17 (28.3%) as Asian; 8 (13.3%) as Hispanic; none (0%) as Native American; and 6 (10%) as black (non-Hispanic), multiracial or other.

Procedure

Participants were exposed to one of four photographs of a woman in which the variables of attractiveness (high and low) and matching the stereotype (match or do not match) were manipulated. After viewing the picture, participants rated their perception of the individual's appearance such that the higher the score the more attractive the person appeared to the participant and the more the photograph matched the expected job stereotype. The five items used to measure perceived physical attractiveness included: The woman in the photograph is good looking, attractive, beautiful, pretty and visually appealing. The five items used to measure whether the

person's appearance was consistent with the stereotype for that job included: The woman in the photograph looks like a secretary/administrative assistant, matches the stereotype of a secretary /administrative assistant, resembles the typical photograph of a secretary/administrative assistant, has the appearance of a secretary/administrative assistant, and features the look of a secretary/administrative assistant.

Data Analysis

A reliability analysis of both the perceived physical attractiveness and job stereotyping items was conducted. Both the attractiveness ($\alpha = .72$) and the job stereotyping ($\alpha = .81$) items were sufficient. As such, these items were summed to form a composite measure.

As predicted, the participants exposed to the images in which the subject's appearance was manipulated to appear highly attractive ($M = 5.94, SD = .69$) perceived the woman in the photograph as more attractive than in the images in which her appearance was manipulated to have low attractiveness ($M = 3.60, SD = .99$). Furthermore, these differences were significant, $t(58) = 10.63, p < .001, r = .81$.

Additionally, participants exposed to the images in which the subject's appearance was manipulated to match the job stereotype of an administrative assistant/secretary ($M = 5.34, SD = 1.01$) perceived the woman to resemble the typical photograph of the profession to a greater extent compared to the images in which she did not match the job stereotype ($M = 2.85, SD = 1.38$). Furthermore, these differences were significant, $t(58) = 7.99, p < .001, r = .72$.

MAIN EXPERIMENT

After the manipulation check successfully confirmed the correct manipulation of the two variables, 118 participants received the main survey. The age of participants ranged from 19 to 63 years of age with a mean of 24.5 ($SD = 6.80$). This sample consisted of students enrolled in a western state university, as well as two western community colleges. This group consisted of 75 males (63.6%) and 39 females (33.1%). Sixty-Three (53.4%) participants reported themselves to be Caucasian, 18 (15.3%) African American, 6 (5.1%) Asian, 13 (11%) Hispanic, 1 (8%) Native American, and 14 (11.9%) as black (non Hispanic), multiracial or other.

Procedure

Upper and lower division classes of a western state university, as well as two classes at western community colleges were solicited to participate. Before completing the study, participants were informed that participation was voluntary, and their identity would remain anonymous. Participants were also

instructed not to write their name or any other personal information on the survey. Participants were only asked to provide information regarding their gender, sex and race in order to provide demographic information about the sample for this experiment. The researcher offered no incentives or inducements for participation.

Participants were exposed to one of the four differing images (four combinations of matching the stereotype and attractiveness) of a woman, and asked to rate their impressions regarding her competence as an administrative assistant on a 7-point Likert-type scale, in accordance with Teven and McCroskey's (1996) measure of ethos and credibility. Testing the three dimension of Teven and McCroskey's scale of measuring ethos and credibility for reliability produced the following Chronbach's alpha reliability values: Goodwill, $\alpha = .76$; Trustworthiness, $\alpha = .76$; and Competence $\alpha = .67$. Since the Competence measure was a bit low, one item was deleted. The final reliability estimate after deleting this item was $\alpha = .74$. Given the sufficient reliability of each of the scales, the individual items were summed to form three composite measures.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 predicted that physical attractiveness (high and low) and perceived job stereotyping (match or unmatched) would interact to impact perceived credibility such that it would be highest for individuals who are physically attractive and high in job stereotyping and lowest for individuals who are physically unattractive and low in job stereotyping. Because credibility is a multidimensional construct and includes the dimensions of competence, goodwill, and trustworthiness, each of these three dimensions are analyzed as independent outcomes.

With respect to perceived competence, a two-way analysis of variance was performed. For these data sets, no interaction effect was found, $F(1, 115) = 1.69, p = .20$. However, a main effect for physical attractiveness, $F(1, 115) = 18.27, p < .001$ and perceived job stereotyping, $F(1, 115) = 9.23, p = .003$ was found (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics). Results showed greater perceived competence for the images with high attractiveness over the images with low attractiveness and for the images matching the job stereotype over the ones not matching the job stereotype image.

Stereotype	High Attractiveness	Low Attractiveness
Matching Job	$\mu = 5.47$	$\mu = 4.60$
Stereotype	$[P(5.16 \leq \mu \leq 5.79) = .95]$	$[P(4.29 \leq \mu \leq 4.91) = .95]$
Not Matching Job	$\mu = 4.79$	$\mu = 4.33$
Stereotype	$[P(4.49 \leq \mu \leq 5.01) = .95]$	$[P(4.02 \leq \mu \leq 4.64) = .95]$

Table 1. Competence means and confidence intervals

With respect to perceived goodwill, a two-way analysis of variance was performed. For these data sets, no interaction effect was found, $F(1, 115) = 2.17, p = .14$. No main effect was found for physical attractiveness, $F(1, 115) = .13, p = .72$ and perceived job stereotyping, $F(1, 115) = 1.53, p = .22$ (see Table 2 for descriptive statistics). Results showed no greater perceived goodwill for the images with high attractiveness over the images with low attractiveness or for the images matching the job stereotype over the ones not matching the job stereotyped image.

Stereotype	High Attractiveness	Low Attractiveness
Matching Job	$\mu = 4.74$	$\mu = 4.44$
Stereotype	$[P(4.41 \leq \mu \leq 5.08) = .95]$	$[P(4.11 \leq \mu \leq 4.77) = .95]$
Not Matching Job	$\mu = 4.29$	$\mu = 4.48$
Stereotype	$[P(3.96 \leq \mu \leq 4.61) = .95]$	$[P(4.14 \leq \mu \leq 4.81) = .95]$

Table 2. Goodwill means and confidence intervals

With respect to perceived trustworthiness, a two-way analysis of variance was performed. For these data sets, no interaction effect was found, $F(1, 115) = 1.29, p = .26$. No main effect was found for physical attractiveness, $F(1, 115) = .31, p = .58$ and perceived job stereotyping, $F(1, 115) = 3.39, p = .07$ (see Table 3 for descriptive statistics). Results showed no greater perceived trustworthiness for the images with high attractiveness over the images with low attractiveness or for the images matching the job stereotype over the ones not matching the job stereotyped image.

Stereotype	High Attractiveness	Low Attractiveness
Matching Job	$\mu = 5.11$	$\mu = 4.83$
Stereotype	$[P(4.77 \leq \mu \leq 5.45) = .95]$	$[P(4.5 \leq \mu \leq 5.16) = .95]$
Not Matching Job	$\mu = 4.61$	$\mu = 4.71$
Stereotype	$[P(4.28 \leq \mu \leq 4.94) = .95]$	$[P(4.37 \leq \mu \leq 5.05) = .95]$

Table 3. Trustworthiness means and confidence intervals

Competence

The descriptive statistics for the dimension of competence turned out as follows: for the photograph of the woman manipulated to appear

unattractive and not matching the stereotype, $M = 4.33$ ($SD = 1.0$); for the photograph in which she appears unattractive and matching the stereotype, $M = 4.6$ ($SD = .80$); in the photograph in which she appears attractive and not matching the stereotype, $M = 4.79$ ($SD = .75$); and in the photograph in which she looks attractive and matches the stereotype, $M = 5.47$ ($SD = .78$). The difference between not matching the stereotype, $M = 4.57$ ($SD = .91$) and matching the stereotype, $M = 5.03$ ($SD = .90$), is statistically significant. Thus, matching the stereotype provides an advantage over people not matching a stereotype regarding the perceptions of competence.

Goodwill

The descriptive statistics for the dimension of goodwill turned out as follows: for the photograph of the woman manipulated to appear unattractive and not matching the stereotype, $M = 4.48$ ($SD = 1.01$); in the photograph in which she appears unattractive and matching the stereotype, $M = 4.44$ ($SD = .68$); in the photograph in which she appears attractive and not matching the stereotype, $M = 4.29$ ($SD = 1.0$); and in the photograph in which she looks attractive and matches the stereotype $M = 4.59$ ($SD = .79$). The difference between not matching the stereotype, $M = 4.38$ ($SD = 1.0$), and matching the stereotype, $M = 4.56$ ($SD = .79$), is not statistically significant. It can be concluded that matching the stereotype provides no advantage over not matching a stereotype regarding perceptions of goodwill.

Trustworthiness

The descriptive statistics for the dimension of trustworthiness turned out as follows: for the photograph of the woman manipulated to appear unattractive and not matching the stereotype, $M = 4.71$ ($SD = .90$); for the photograph in which she appears unattractive and matching the stereotype, $M = 4.83$ ($SD = .79$); in the photograph in which she appears attractive and not matching the stereotype, $M = 4.61$ ($SD = .95$); and in the photograph in which she looks attractive and matches the stereotype, $M = 4.97$ ($SD = .88$). The difference between not matching the stereotype, $M = 4.66$ ($SD = .92$) and matching the stereotype, $M = 4.97$ ($SD = .88$), is not statistically significant. It can be concluded that matching the stereotype provides no advantage over not matching a stereotype regarding perceptions of trustworthiness.

DISCUSSION

The results show that there are some statistically significant differences between the images of the woman featuring both desirable variables (high attractiveness and matching the positive job stereotype) and the photograph showing a version of the subject featuring neither desirable variables, (low

attractiveness and not matching the positive job stereotype). No significant difference was found between any other combinations of images.

From the gathered information between low attractiveness and high attractiveness, and matching or not matching the job stereotype, the conclusion can be drawn that attractiveness and stereotypes are strong variables that influence perceptions of competence. By manipulating the two variables, the same person was perceived as more competent and, therefore, perhaps more suitable for the profession of an administrative assistant. Nevertheless, H1 has been rejected because the two variables combined did not appear to have an enhanced effect on people's perceptions of competence, goodwill or trustworthiness as predicted.

The difference amongst the means of the two images with only one desirable variable (high attractiveness or matching the job stereotype) did not show any significant statistical difference between the photograph with neither one of the desirable variables (low attractiveness and not matching the job stereotype) nor the photograph with both (high attractiveness and matching the job stereotype). In other words, the version of the photograph featuring the woman whose appearance was manipulated to have low attractiveness but fulfilled the job stereotype (featuring only one of two desirable variables) was, on average, not perceived as more competent than the woman in the photograph who appeared to feature low attractiveness and did not match the job stereotype. The numbers support the same result between the photographs featuring only one desirable variable (high attractiveness and not matching the job stereotype) and the photograph featuring both (high attractiveness and matching the job stereotype). Thus, an attractive person who matches the stereotype is only perceived as more competent in comparison with a person who lacks attractiveness and does not match the stereotype. As soon as one of the two variables is present, no difference in the perception of good or bad was found.

Finally, there was no statistical difference found amongst the four photographs regarding the dimensions of trustworthiness and goodwill. Only the dimension of competence was attributed favorably to the photographs featuring attractiveness or matching the stereotype. This result means that the desirable variables (attractiveness and matching the stereotype) only enhanced the positive perception of the dimension of competence, but had no effect on depicting the person's trustworthiness or goodwill as all four versions of the woman in the photographs were seen as equally trustworthy and caring. This finding is not surprising because the same person is shown in all four photographs and the characteristics of goodwill and trustworthiness may be

more descriptive of a person's inherent, essential personality traits rather than factors taken into account in context with a profession.

LIMITATIONS

It is important to emphasize that the research findings are closely tied to the designated profession of and stereotypes about an administrative assistant/secretary. The perception of a subject depends heavily on the stereotypical parameters society has set for a particular profession. For instance, if the designated job in the present research had not been an administrative assistant, but instead an occupation with a strong gender bias in favor of males (such as finance or engineering), the subject in the photographs may have been perceived as highly incompetent, simply because of her gender. In contrast, if the job had been designated as a stereotypically traditional one predominantly associated with the female gender (such as a nanny or housekeeper), the subject may have been perceived as highly competent. Therefore, the findings cannot be applied to the workforce in general, but only to the specific profession of administrative assistants/secretaries, since biases vary in accordance to the occupation.

Another important factor limiting the study's findings is the fact that, for the sake of controlling for variables, the same subject was used to depict four different individuals. It is not surprising that the manipulated variables can only alter overall appearance to a certain extent. Even though the manipulation check confirmed that participants perceived the subject in accordance to the manipulated variables and a statistically significant difference was present, the difference was not tremendous.

Participants perceived the attractive versions of the subject as more attractive than the unattractive ones, but it could not be inferred that the attractive version was perceived as exceptionally beautiful and the version featuring low attractiveness as extraordinarily ugly. The present study used the same individual with the same face, so to speak, which makes less of a difference than comparing an objectively super-attractive individual who is matched up against another, completely different, below-average-looking person. Under such circumstances, a completely different result may be produced.

Make-up and hairstyles can only enhance, disguise or pronounce certain features, but cannot alter the symmetry and proportions of a person's face. It is also important that many, perhaps even most, stereotypes are tied to unchangeable factors such as race, sex or age, which were not regarded in this research. To make the subject appear more like a secretary, the researcher only altered apparel, accessories and hairstyle, producing a noticeable, yet slight difference. A young, African American administrative assistant who

is male would probably be perceived tremendously different than an elderly female of Asian descent in the same profession.

It is also crucial to mention that Teven and McCroskey's (1996) measure of ethos and credibility dedicates two of the three dimensions to goodwill and trustworthiness. Participants may have detached these dimensions from the designated profession and based their assessment more on basic character traits than on requirements for outstanding professional performance. For instance, the unattractive subject who did not match the stereotype may have appeared to be incompetent in her profession, but she nevertheless could still be perceived as an honest, trustworthy person with goodwill, who would conduct herself ethically in any given circumstance.

A profession more reliant on these character traits such as a kindergarten teacher, caretaker, housemaid, therapist or accountant may have led to a different result in overall perception of job performance, since these attributes would be assigned greater significance when practicing a profession where a person's character and ethos are important requisites. Perhaps the work of an administrative assistant is perceived as a duty where trustworthiness and goodwill are relatively unimportant characteristics and not necessarily indicative of good performance in the job.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Even though there was no statistically significant difference found between the two photographs depicting only one desirable variable and the other two photographs featuring both or no desirable variables, there may still be interesting information to derive from the results. The finding regarding the photographs with both variables and the one with none may be of interest for future research since the present study confirmed that stereotypes and attractiveness guide people, and that they alter perception even when the appearance of the same individual is altered.

The same person was rated as significantly less competent when she appeared unattractive and did not match the stereotype in a photograph, as opposed to being attractive and fitting into the stereotypical group of an administrative assistant. This suggests that there might be a significant difference when two distinct people are evaluated. If the study focused on two different individuals with distinctive facial features; strongly varying degrees of physical attractiveness; and different races, genders and ages, then the results may have shown astounding differences in perception. Future research in this area could be tied to the larger body of research dedicated to identifying biases based on the perception of race and sex in the workforce.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research project are consistent with the literature. Attractiveness and stereotypes are strong variables that determine a person's perception of professionalism and competence when evaluating others. Even though the two variables of attractiveness and matching the stereotype each are important for assessing perceived job performance, the findings still do not provide any indication that the two variables combined created a tremendously positive, most desired impression that significantly triumphed over the other photographs, as it was hypothesized.

In addition, attractiveness and matching the stereotype seemed to be equally significant variables in this experiment. The means of perceived competence for the photographs featuring only one variable were almost identical. This result may indicate that people are equally influenced by stereotypes and the tendency to attribute positive features to beauty as originally suggested by Dion, Berscheid and Walster (1972).

Once people become aware that they may be influenced by certain irrelevant variables such as attractiveness and stereotypes, they may instead be able to produce evaluations, judgments and assessments more objectively—based on relevant parameters such as education, skills, abilities, knowledge, qualifications and experiences. Further research could be used as a foundation for another step forward in the attempt to minimize stereotyping, prejudice and unjustified judgments in the workforce caused by the unreasonable practice of letting perception influence judgment.

This experiment exemplified the findings of previous research showing that the impressions and perceptions of other people's competence can be influenced by mere appearance and the context in which they are placed (such as the specific profession). This finding, in context with other research conducted in the field, may be able to explain unjust, discriminatory and biased practices in the workforce. It may also help to create awareness of the unreasonable behavior of associating physical traits with skills and knowledge.

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