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G.I. Average Joe: The Clothes do Not Necessarily Make the Man

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There is substantial research to support that attire plays a critical role in worker employability as well as in perceived attractiveness. In a 2 X 2 between-subjects factorial design, 120 predominantly college-aged female students at two different universities (one having a military affiliation) were asked to rate the attractiveness levels of male individuals in one of two sets of photographs. One set contained images of six men in military uniform and the other set contained images of the same men in civilian attire. Despite research that states otherwise, it was found in this study that there is not enough evidence to say conclusively whether females prefer men in military dress versus casual attire. Results were discussed in terms of the impact of individual differences on the “the clothes make the man” postulation.

There is much research to support that physical attractiveness greatly influences the personal attributes ascribed to an individual upon a first impression. Persons who are perceived as more attractive are generally initially highly regarded and are judged as more intelligent, kind, sociable, competent, and successful than are their less attractive counterparts (Bersheid & Walster, 1974; Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Miller, 1970; Fowler-Hermes, 2001). Although physical characteristics are an important aspect of attractiveness, research has also shown that attire is a determinant of attractiveness as well (Bardack & McAndrew, 1985).

Attire can have a great effect not only on the perceived attractiveness of the wearer but also on the success of the individual in the job market. In the business world, it pays to be attractive because it usually brings about some sort of economic advantage (Bosman, Pfann, & Hamermesh, 1997; Schoenberger, 1997; Fowler-Hermes, 2001). Those who do dress more fashionably tend to more easily attain jobs, and those jobs generally pay more and are more appealing to workers than are jobs more frequently attained by less fashionable dressers (Bardack et al., 1985; Mulford, Orbell, Shatto, & Stockard, 1998; Fowler-Hermes, 2001). Even in the armed forces, a place of war, there is still evidence to suggest that the appearance of a serviceman plays a role in determining what types of jobs and positions are given to that individual (Collins & Zebrowitz, 1995).

Today, clothing can literally “make the man.” It can make him an unemployed man, or, by modifying something as simple as dress, it can make him a successful business tycoon. Because people are more willing to cooperate with others whom they find attractive (Mulford et al., 1998), initiating a business deal is easier for an attractive person, as potential clients are more willing to enter negotiations in the first place. As well, an attractive person is more likely to make a greater financial gain through any deal he/she might make because studies have shown that attractive business people can influence potential customers more efficiently than can less attractive business people (Mulford et al., 1998; Fowler-Hermes, 2001).

In current society, a significant emphasis is placed upon job security and economic status. Because employability depends so heavily upon attractiveness and attractiveness depends so heavily upon attire, not only can a poor choice of clothing keep a person from attaining employment, it is often the case that the wrong type of clothing can keep one from acquiring a well-paying job: as women in particular tend to select marriage partners based on the male’s ability to provide for her and for her children, men in good financial standing (or those whose economic prospects are good) are more likely to be attractive to women (Singh, 1995). In fact, it has been shown that men dressed in business suits are perceived as more attractive than are men dressed in casual attire among female college students (Mehrabian & Blum, 1997) and among women in the business world (German & Hewitt, 1987). However, the German and Hewitt study has also shown that men in military uniform are rated as even more attractive than are men in business suits.

Whether this is a result of the appearance or of the connotations behind the uniform (i.e., power or “manliness”), females have come to associate the uniform with a successful (or at least currently active) job status. Women who are continuously exposed to the ties between the armed forces and higher education are more likely to see the military as stable employment and are accordingly more likely to find this stability attractive. In the current study, it is expected that while college-aged females at both military and non-military institutions will rate male, college-aged men in military uniform as more attractive

than college-aged men in civilian attire, the females at the military institution will rate the men in uniform as even more attractive than will their non-military counterparts because of a greater awareness of the occupational possibilities and opportunities for advancement that the military has to offer.

Method

Participants

The participants were 120 predominantly traditionally aged female students, 60 from North Georgia College and State University and 60 from Kennesaw State University. Participants from North Georgia College and State University were recruited from the student center immediately outside of the canteen, a dining facility on campus. Those from Kennesaw State University were recruited from the dining area in the student center.

In addition to the female participants, six male members of the Air Force ROTC program at the University of Georgia volunteered to have their picture taken in both civilian attire and their Class A uniforms for use in this study.

Procedure

Female students were approached and asked to rate the attractiveness levels of images of six men. After agreeing to participate, participants were given one of two binders containing six photographs of different University of Georgia Air Force ROTC cadets. One binder contained photographs of the cadets in their Class A “dress blues” uniforms, the other contained photographs of the same six cadets in civilian attire. Participants were also issued a scoring sheet on which they were to write the picture ID number for each photograph and to indicate on a 1-7 Likert-type scale how attractive they found each man (1 being “unattractive” and 7 being “extremely attractive”). After completing the scoring sheet, the participants were then debriefed on the experiment and were thanked for their participation.

Design

A 2 (Attire: civilian or military) X 2 (University of female participant: North Georgia College and State University or Kennesaw State University) between-subjects factorial design was used to examine the possibility that the perception of the attractiveness of men as it pertains to military involvement varies between military and non-military institutions.

To avoid confounds, the cadets were asked to stand against a common wall, to place their feet shoulder width apart with hands behind their backs, and to wear a solid colored shirt when posing for their civilian attire photograph. They were also instructed not to smile as smiling has been shown to affect perceived attractiveness (Reis, Wilson, Monestere, Bernstein, Clark, Seidl, et al., 1990). After taking both sets of photographs (civilian and military uniform) the two images for each subject were compared to insure consistency between facial expression, stance, and framing within the photograph.

To avoid a possible order affect, each male subject was assigned an arbitrary identification number and the photographs were randomly arranged inside the binder for each of the female participants.

Results

The hypothesis that the males in military uniform would be rated as more attractive than would males in civilian attire was only partially supported. There was a significant effect of attire on attractiveness for subject 24 at both NGCSU, $F(1,5) = 23.17$, $p = .00$ ($\eta^2 = .33$), and at KSU, $F(1,5) = 21.23$, $p = .00$ ($\eta^2 = .30$), such that he was found to be more attractive in military attire than in civilian clothing. There was a significant effect of attire on attractiveness for subject 59 at NGCSU, $F(1,5) = 5.66$, $p = .021$ ($\eta^2 = .11$), such that he was found to be more attractive in military attire than in civilian clothing at NGCSU, but not at KSU, $F(1,5) = 2.49$, $p > .05$ ($\eta^2 = .10$). There was no significant effect of attire on attractiveness for subject 62 at NGCSU, $F(1,5) = 2.66$, $p > .05$ ($\eta^2 = .28$), but there was a significant effect at KSU, $F(1,5) = 20.27$, $p = .000$ ($\eta^2 = .08$), such that he was found to be more attractive in military attire than in civilian clothing.

There was no significant effect of attire on attractiveness for subject 80 at NGCSU, $F(1,5) = 0.27$, $p > .05$ ($\eta^2 = .07$), or at KSU, $F(1,5) = 1.55$, $p > .05$ ($\eta^2 = .06$). There was no significant effect of attire on attractiveness for subject 17 at NGCSU, $F(1,5) = .052$, $p > .05$ ($\eta^2 = .08$) or at KSU, $F(1,5) = 0.14$, $p > .05$ ($\eta^2 = .05$). There was no significant effect of attire on attractiveness for subject 47 at NGCSU, but there was a significant effect at KSU, $F(1,5) = 8.031$, $p = .006$ ($\eta^2 = .05$), such that he was found to be more attractive in civilian clothing than in military attire.

It was also discovered that the group means for the two schools differed: Kennesaw State University's scores of attractiveness were consistently higher than were those for North Georgia College and State University. At NGCSU, the group mean of attractiveness scores for females rating photographs of the men in uniform was 3.51 and for civilian clothing was 3.07. At KSU, the group mean of attractiveness scores for men in uniform was 3.75 and for civilian clothing was 3.33.

Discussion

The results of this study show that there is not enough evidence to determine whether the female student populations at North Georgia College and State University and at Kennesaw State University favor men in military uniform over men dressed in casual attire. Although females at both schools had a tendency to rate the photographs of men in uniform as more attractive than the photographs of men in civilian clothing, the data from both schools showed a significant difference in the scores for only two of the six subjects (59 and 24 at North Georgia College and State University and 62 and 24 at Kennesaw State University). In addition, Kennesaw State University rated one subject, number 47, as more attractive in civilian attire than in military uniform. Upon review, it was noted that this inconsistency could be attributed to discrepancies in civilian dress worn by each cadet. While each did wear solid colored shirts, the experiment did not control for belts, necklaces, or having shirts tucked in versus pulled out. As well, three of the subjects wore solid white t-shirts while the other three opted for black, brown, and gray, colors more typical among a student population. In future studies, it should be considered that the civilian attire be as uniformed as the uniforms themselves in order to avoid these confounds.

Another thing that should be considered is the haircut style of the men. In any further experiments, steps should be taken to cover the hair of the subjects. While a

military-style haircut is appropriate for one in military dress, it might have confounded the results for the sets of data pertaining to civilian attire by evoking in the female participants a connotation to the armed forces. This could explain the lack of significance between the two sets of scores; females looking at both sets of photographs may have experienced a military connection, although it was not as strong for those looking at the civilian set. This could also account for the finding that the scores for both sets of photographs at North Georgia College and State University were slightly lower than were those obtained from Kennesaw State University. Due to in-group differentiation bias, a female from North Georgia College and State University, a military institution, would be more likely to notice differences among military cadets (or men whose haircuts caused them to resemble military cadets) than would a female from a non-military institution, such as Kennesaw State University.

It does not seem likely, however, that the above-stated discrepancies could account for the absence of the “the clothes make the man” phenomenon if that phenomenon were as strong as previous researchers would have us believe it to be (Bardack et al., 1985; Mulford, Orbell, Shatto, & Stockard, 1998; Fowler-Hermes, 2001). Based on the results of the current study, it may be possible that the man in question is “made” by the personal preferences (here, military or not) of the woman assessing him, and not by any particular aspect of his person in itself, including his clothes. Although previous research has shown attire to be a determinant of attractiveness (Bardack & McAndrew, 1985), when what constitutes “acceptable” clothing is not defined by the situation (as it is in the job market), this link may be weak or nonexistent. It is likely that in the dating arena, each would-be partner looks for possible mates who possess certain attributes, including that of a particular style of dress. As studies have shown that observers attribute positive characteristics to individuals who were dressed in a style the observer found to be attractive (Bersheid & Walster, 1974; Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Miller, 1970; Fowler-Hermes, 2001), it is logical to assume that observers would attribute negative characteristics to individuals who were dressed in a style the observer found unattractive. Some women, for example, may be attracted to a man in a particular uniform, whereas other women might be “turned-off” by that same uniform: these women may attribute positive or negative characteristics to the man based on their opinion of his attire. Therefore, it is possible that it is the man who makes the clothes.

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Appendix A

Picture ID: _____

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7
Unattractive Moderately Attractive Extremely Attractive

Picture ID: _____

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7
Unattractive Moderately Attractive Extremely Attractive

Picture ID: _____

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7
Unattractive Moderately Attractive Extremely Attractive

Picture ID: _____

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7
Unattractive Moderately Attractive Extremely Attractive

Picture ID: _____

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7
Unattractive Moderately Attractive Extremely Attractive

Picture ID: _____

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7
Unattractive Moderately Attractive Extremely Attractive

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