

## INFLUENCE OF STYLE OF DRESS ON FORMATION OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS<sup>1</sup>

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*Summary.*—Within a university, students of various colleges dress differently. Our purpose was to verify the influence of style of dress on formation of first impressions. Subjects were 30 women of three colleges from a university in São Paulo. Subjects rated on a 7-point scale three photographs (without faces) of male students from each one of the three colleges. The first model dressed in a socially formal way, the second one in a socially informal way, and the third one sportively. The three models were rated comparably on intelligence and culture. The model who dressed in a socially formal way was considered less handsome, extroverted, sympathetic, charming, and attractive than the other two models. Subjects tended also to attribute to the first a rightist ideology. No interactions were found between subjects' and models' colleges.

People choose their clothes thinking about their social meaning. The sixties/seventies hippies, metalists, the military, orthodox Jews, Arab women, Hare-Krishnas, school students, etc., clothe themselves to acknowledge being part of their social groups. Clothes' characteristics transmit information about age, sex, personality traits, socioeconomic status, values, political ideologies, etc. They may also indicate interpersonal attitudes, such as, aggressiveness, availability, gracefulness, arrogance, etc.

Dion, Bersheid, and Walster (1972) suggest that, if there is a correlation between persons' internal characteristics and appearance, then there are stereotypes by which personality traits are associated with characteristics inferred from appearance. These authors reported that persons considered physically attractive were also rated as happier and more successful than those considered not attractive. Observers tended to characterize attractive subjects more favorably, attributing to them higher competence, gentleness, responsibility, better jobs, more happiness in marriage, etc. Hamid (1968) suggested that clothes play an important part in the formation of those stereotypes. Lambert (1972) shows that well-dressed persons have more chance of positive interactions with others than persons less well dressed.

Informal observations show that, in a university, people belonging to

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one college tend to dress in a similar way. Economics students, for instance, characterize themselves with more formal clothing. Architectural and communications students dress in a more creative, unconventional way. Students in philosophy and social sciences dress easily and discretely. Physical education students dress sportively.

In this paper it was intended to verify the influence of style of dress on forming first impressions. It was also intended to evaluate how much identification with the style of dress observed influenced formation of first impressions. We tested university students, taking advantage of the differences in dress among colleges.

#### METHOD

The subjects were 30 female university students, randomly chosen from three colleges (Economics, Communications and Arts, and Physical Education) of a university in São Paulo. They were Caucasian and ranged in age from 19.2 to 26.3 yr. old ( $M = 21.8$  yr.). Subjects participated individually in what was described as a study of person perception.

Eight photographs of male students were taken in color, representing each of the three colleges. From a total of 24 photographs, three were selected, one from each college. The Economics model dressed in a socially formal way, the one in Communications and Arts in a socially informal way, and the model from Physical Education sportively. On other characteristics, such as age, height, body structure, and hair color, they were similar. The faces were erased from the photographs to avoid influence of facial expression on the judgements of subjects. The models in the photographs appeared in a frontal position, standing, with the arms relaxed alongside the body.

After looking at a photograph for 10 seconds, each subject answered a questionnaire in which she was asked to rate the model on a 7-point semantic differential scale, relative to the characteristics of ugly-handsome, introverted-extroverted, unsympathetic-sympathetic, not intelligent-intelligent, not charming-charming, uncultured-cultured, and repugnant-attractive. Each subject also indicated whether the model was well dressed or not, his political ideology, his socioeconomic status, and his approximate age.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The mean ratings for each scale were submitted to an analysis of variance in a factorial design 3 (models' college)  $\times$  3 (subjects' college) with repeated measures (Keppel, 1973), because every subject evaluated each one of the three models. Table 1 shows means and standard deviations on each adjective continuum, and Table 2 shows summaries of analyses. The three models had comparable ratings on intelligence and culture; however, significant differences appeared for the main effect of models' college. The model who dressed in a socially formal manner was rated systematically lower than the other two, who dressed in socially informal and sportive manners.

TABLE 1  
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS ON EACH ADJECTIVE CONTINUUM

Characteristics	Models' College								
	Economics			Communication, Arts			Physical Education		
	Subjects' College			Subjects' College			Subjects' College		
	E*	C	P	E	C	P	E	C	P
Ugly-Handsome									
<i>M</i>	3.5	4.1	3.1	3.9	5.3	4.7	4.7	4.6	5.0
<i>SD</i>	1.7	.7	1.1	1.0	1.0	.7	1.6	1.0	1.1
Introverted-Extroverted									
<i>M</i>	3.7	3.3	2.7	4.6	4.4	5.0	6.0	5.6	4.9
<i>SD</i>	1.1	1.3	.7	1.5	1.2	2.1	.5	.7	1.5
Unsympathetic-Sympathetic									
<i>M</i>	4.2	3.9	4.1	5.0	4.6	5.5	5.4	4.8	4.6
<i>SD</i>	1.0	.9	1.5	1.1	1.7	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.4
Not Intelligent-Intelligent									
<i>M</i>	5.0	4.4	4.2	4.9	5.2	4.8	4.0	4.5	4.7
<i>SD</i>	1.4	1.0	1.2	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.4	1.2	1.3
Not Charming-Charming									
<i>M</i>	2.9	3.4	1.9	5.0	5.0	5.1	4.3	4.2	4.7
<i>SD</i>	1.7	1.0	.9	1.4	1.5	1.5	2.1	1.1	1.1
Uncultured-Cultured									
<i>M</i>	5.0	4.8	4.5	4.9	5.4	5.1	4.1	4.3	4.4
<i>SD</i>	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.0	.8	1.3	1.5	1.1	.8
Repugnant-Attractive									
<i>M</i>	3.9	3.9	3.6	4.8	5.4	5.5	4.8	4.6	4.9
<i>SD</i>	1.5	.7	.8	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.5	1.3	.9

\*E = Economics, C = Communication and Arts, P = Physical Education.

The first was considered as less handsome, extroverted, sympathetic, charming, and attractive than the others. These results confirm the previously observed stereotypes associated with dress (Hamid, 1968; Lambert, 1972). The main effect for the subjects' college and the interaction of the subjects' college  $\times$  models' college were not statistically significant. This lack of interaction surprised us, for we expected an identification of the subjects with the colleges' characteristic styles.

In analysis of the semantic differentials, the Economics college model was systematically evaluated more negatively than were the other two. The Communications and Arts model was rated higher than the Physical Education model on attributes of nonsympathetic-sympathetic, not charming-charming, and repugnant-attractive. The Physical Education model was rated higher than the second model on attributes of ugly-handsome and introverted-extroverted.

Subjects differentiated the models on political ideology ( $\chi_4^2 = 44.54, p < .05$ ), age ( $\chi_6^2 = 54.41, p < .05$ ), and quality of dress ( $\chi_2^2 = 6.31, p < .05$ ). The model dressed in a socially formal manner was considered better dressed

TABLE 2  
SUMMARY: ANALYSES OF VARIANCE FOR SEVEN-POINT RATINGS (N = 30)

Characteristics	F Ratios		
	Models' College	Subjects' College	Interaction
Ugly-Handsome	12.43†	1.75	2.31
Introverted-Extroverted	30.06†	1.10	1.58
Unsympathetic-Sympathetic	6.42*	.70	.96
Not Intelligent-Intelligent	1.87	.09	1.18
Not Charming-Charming	22.37†	.32	1.56
Uncultured-Cultured	4.59	.19	.49
Repugnant-Attractive	13.58†	.16	.73

\* $p < .05$ . † $p < .01$ .

and older than his colleagues. The subjects tended also to attribute to him a rightist ideology.

This line of research needs to be explored to amplify the number of styles of dress considered and to include both sexes.

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