2006

The Effect of Applicant Appearance on Hiring Decisions, Perceptions of Job Performance and Perceptions of Applicant Confidence

Suzan M. Elzey
St. John Fisher College

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The Effect of Applicant Appearance on Hiring Decisions, Perceptions of Job Performance and Perceptions of Applicant Confidence

Abstract
This qualitative case study focused on the Impact of appearance in relation to perception, confidence and job performance. It used five professional participants from various industries in Rochester, NY to investigate the perceptions and impact of attractiveness during the interview process. The following are key themes that were found: ~ Non verbal communication is paramount. All five participants discussed the importance of eye contact, staying focused and being engaged. ~ Good listening skills being engaged are a plus ~ First impressions are indeed lasting ~ Dress is important but it is not everything ~ Confidence, knowledge and strong interpersonal skills are extremely beneficial during the interview process The researcher suggests that appearance, specifically; mode of dress is directly correlated with the perception of confidence and success. Appearance is a major factor in hiring decisions. The researcher cautions applicants from depending solely on appearance alone, as experience, and skills are extremely important but appearance plays a major factor in perception.

Document Type
Thesis

Degree Name
MS in Human Resource Development

Department
Education

Subject Categories
Education

This thesis is available at Fisher Digital Publications: http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_ETD_masters/165
The Effect of Applicant Appearance on Hiring Decisions,
Perceptions of Job Performance and Perceptions of Applicant Confidence

Suzan M. Elzey
St. John Fisher College
## GHRD Final Masters Paper Review

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Additional Comments:
Dedication

This project is dedicated to my loving family: daughter AnnDrea, husband Daimon, mother Andrea, father Al, sisters Jackie and Joy, nephew Isaiah, niece Ellie. Thank you for your love and support.

In memory of our son Paul Romeo.
Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, through Him all things are possible.

I would like to express my gratitude to a host of people who have supported me through this graduate program. First, to my family who provided me with love, direction and patience from beginning to end.

To my advisor Dr. Tim Franz, who provided me with guidance, direction and a graduate education that I will certainly use in my professional and personal life. Dr. Franz has inspired me to push my limits and go outside of my comfort zone with his teaching and inspiration. Dr. Silver, thank you for the excellent lessons in empowerment and leadership. I have been so fortunate to use some of your tools in my professional life. To Bonnie Bates, because of you I was accepted into the program. Thank your for your encouragement. To Dr. Pat Carroll, I admit I was a skeptic of Process Consultation, now I'm a believer!

To all of the St. John Fisher alumni and members of cohorts seven and eight. It was a great experience and I have truly learned the meaning of T-E-A-M. Through your support, collaboration and prayers, I have completed this graduate degree. Many thanks and blessings.
Abstract

This qualitative case study focused on the impact of appearance in relation to perception, confidence and job performance. It used five professional participants from various industries in Rochester, NY to investigate the perceptions and impact of attractiveness during the interview process. The following are key themes that were found:

→ Non verbal communication is paramount. All five participants discussed the importance of eye contact, staying focused and being engaged.
→ Good listening skills being engaged are a plus
→ First impressions are indeed lasting
→ Dress is important but it is not everything
→ Confidence, knowledge and strong interpersonal skills are extremely beneficial during the interview process

The researcher suggests that appearance, specifically; mode of dress is directly correlated with the perception of confidence and success. Appearance is a major factor in hiring decisions. The researcher cautions applicants from depending solely on appearance alone, as experience, and skills are extremely important but appearance plays a major factor in perception.
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Chapter 1

Overview

American culture associates traditional business attire with power, prestige, and rank (Rosenblat, 2001). The role of clothing is an essential predictor in personal perception (Conner, Nagasawa & Peters, 1975). For example, people often distinguish a female secretary from a female executive by the clothing they wear. Whether an individual has a corner office or sits at the front desk reception area, it is essential to dress the part (Sheridan, 1988). While evaluating candidates, interviewers are also influenced by other image factors such as dress, assertiveness, and neatness (Sheridan, 1988).

Professional employees are judged by what they wear and how they wear it. (Dias and Kleiner, 1996). Many people make these judgments based upon first impressions. Should the initial impression be negative, a perceiver may never look past an individual’s clothing to better understand his or her inner strengths (1996). That is why one’s outward appearance is paramount to success.

According to Dias and Kleiner (1996), “business clients want to deal with someone they can trust, and dressing conservatively helps the business person obtain this image” (p. 28). In addition, relationships are built on trust and gaining trust is key to developing and retaining a quality relationship. By dressing for the position an individual wants, superiors, peers, subordinates, and clients will notice and interpret that person as being serious.
Grooming for career success includes clothes, accessories, hair, and makeup all combined for a total look (Dias & Kleiner, 1996). Image consultants warn that while following their advice may not guarantee landing that sought after job, it may help prevent you from losing it.

Problem Statement

There is a need for a study to further investigate the impact of appearance and its relation to perceptions of job success, perceptions of applicant confidence, and predictions of hiring decisions. Investigating the positive and negative effects of the perception of personal appearance in the workplace is an intriguing study for human resource professionals to gage and possibly prevent appearance discrimination. Researchers demonstrate that people perceived as "good-looking" earn more (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994). Clearly, one’s outward appearance affects perceptions of workplace performance.

HRD professionals and organizations should be concerned about the impact of the “beauty premium” (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994). One way to accomplish this is to investigate the possible means through which physical attractiveness affects hiring decisions. As Rosenblat suggests, “Discovering the ultimate cause of possible discrimination will enhance our ability to develop appropriate public policy interventions” (2001, p. 2). Professionals should strive to understand the root-cause of probable appearance biases by increasing awareness to prevent possible conscious and unconscious appearance biases. Thus, this study focuses on the following two questions. First, do recruiters and hiring managers be more likely to hire individuals based on personal appearance?
Second, can appearance serve as a compass for personal success and confidence?

Purpose of this Study

This study examined whether professionals should attend more closely their personal professional appearance to improve their chances of securing the position they are seeking by defining the characteristics for which employers are looking.

An investigative approach of appearance in the workplace of professional and non-professional staff will enable employees to dress more effectively to impress for the position desired. This study includes interviews with employers and supervisors asking about their expectations and the impact of appearance in the workplace.

This study examined and discusses the relevance of first impressions and perceptions of interviewers and hiring managers during initial interviews. Research proves attractive candidates receive higher compensation (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994). Through a series of interviews and specific observations, this study tested the impact attractiveness has on the interviewing process and outcomes.

In today’s difficult job market (Morem, 2005), candidates need any advantage during the interviewing process. Interviewers use verbal cues such as speech, diction and articulation as well as non-verbal cues such as dress, firm handshake, grooming, positive self-image and posture, to make hiring decisions.
Applicants who are aware of these interviewer expectations are clearly more likely to be hired.

Research questions

The following questions will be addressed in this study:

1. What do employers think that appearance impacts an individual's job success?
2. What is the impact of appearance on hiring decisions?
3. Do supervisors and employees think that an applicant's appearance and confidence are related?
4. Does an employee who is judged as dressed more professional mean that interviewers expect them to be more successful?

Study significance

This proposed study is to examine the perceptions and the interpretations of hiring managers on the impact of appearance, specifically this study will be based on qualitative interviews. This study has implications for Human Resource professionals, Human Resource researchers, hiring organizations, and job candidates. In addition, this study will help to improve awareness to help prevent possible appearance biases. Finally, it may serve as a guide by providing information on proper dress expectations to job candidates.

Conceptual Framework

The literature review of this study will be primarily based on the works of Eagly, Makhijani, Ahsnore and Longo (1991), Hammermesh and Biddle (1994),

Physical attractiveness and hiring decisions are clearly correlated (Hamermesh and Biddle, 1994). Systematically, good-looking people have an advantage during the interview process because hiring managers tend to prefer their physical appearance and good-looking people “are more qualified because their physical appearance has previously helped them obtain better skills through the utilization of more extended social networks” (Rosenblat, 2001, pg. 1).

According to Hamermesh and Biddle (1994), the initial impression made on the interviewer “creates a presumption that has a strong effect on the rest of the interview” (p. 1179). In addition, Hamermesh and Biddle further states that how a candidate is dressed will impact the interview by 80 percent. Regardless of the actual percent impact, it is clear that first impressions based on appearance play a distinct role in the hiring process and with the interviewer’s selection and opinion of the potential new hire.

When a candidate presents for an interview the interviewer will assess him during the first few seconds of the encounter. (Morem, 2002) The interviewer evaluates the candidate on appearance: attractiveness, dress/attire immediately upon the entrance. The first few minutes of the interviewer's first impression of the candidate are paramount.

Although standards and norms are constantly changing in the workplace, there are some standards that have been adapted into the workplace such as professional dress and grooming. Professional dress is often described as dress
that is somewhat conservative in the business world (Dias & Kleiner, 1996). For women, this dress includes a skirt or pants suit and stocking hose with pumps; for men, a blue, gray or black suit, dress shirt, tie, and dress shoes. The American labor market has accepted this conservative dress as the preferred attire, especially for meetings among professional and/or executive positions (Dias & Kleiner, 1996).

Even though organizations expect professional dress, upon entering for an interview will the candidate’s attractiveness and attire profoundly impact the perception of the interviewer? Research (Eagly, Makhijani, Ashmore, & Longo, 1991) supports that the perception of good-looking people having more successful life outcomes including marital happiness, increased income and that beauty is a preferred strength (Eagly, et al., 1991). In addition, Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1972) show that “what is beautiful is good” (p.285) implying the existence a stereotype “whereby physically attractive people are believed to possess a wide variety of positive personal qualities” (Eagly, et al., 1991, p. 109).

According to Eagly and colleagues (1991) “most research has addressed three broad questions: a) Are attractive people perceived differently than unattractive people? b) Are attractive people treated differently than unattractive people? c) Do attractive people have different characteristics (i.e., personality traits, skills, behaviors) than unattractive people?” (p. 110). To answer these questions, Eagly and colleagues conducted a meta-analysis where they report that attractive people, on average, received higher evaluations than less attractive people. In addition, attractive people were perceived to be more
socially competent and intelligent. As a result, the present research study uses Eagly and colleague's dimensions as the core for understanding the effect of attire on perceptions of others.

Other research (Forsythe, Drake, & Cox, 1985) has confirmed the role of clothing during the selection process has direct implications on hiring. This is because clothing is a non-verbal cue that emits an image and impression on the interviewer and it is a large component of an individual's overall personal appearance. Proper professional work attire is associated with status and success. Thus, interviewees who dress more professionally are afforded with higher perceived status and success.

**Scope of the study**

The way someone dresses can also directly affect hiring decisions. According to Forsythe, Drake, and Cox (1985), the role of clothing plays a significant part on personnel selection and perception. Their research supports a vast difference in what is considered proper formal dress criteria for female executives versus male. In fact, organizations and applicants partake in a process of attempting to look attractive to each other (Schuler, Farr, Smith 1993).
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The Attractiveness Factor

Chapter 2 introduces the theories of attractiveness and selection, stereotypes, image formation and how they impact people’s perceptions. Personal appearance and attractiveness play a part in the hiring process as research has proved. Numerous studies have been conducted on the phenomena surrounding the impact and effect of personal appearance and it’s relevance on success, selection and confidence.

Specifically, there have been studies (de Souza, Baião & Otta, 2003) that show that good-looking people have significant advantages during the interviewing process because that is when people form impressions. Physical appearance is a dominant source of information during initial introductions and social engagements (de Souza, et al., 2003). In fact, physical qualities can even affect people’s impressions about an individual’s socio-economic status, intelligence and competence (Knapp & Hall, 1992).

Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1986) suggest that “what is beautiful is good” (p. 285). This statement suggests that people’s perceptions of others is linked to beauty and goodness. Further, it clearly shows the existence of a stereotype “whereby physically attractive individuals are believed to possess a wide variety of positive personal qualities” (Eagly, Makhijani, Ashmore & Longo p. 109, 1991).
Eagly and colleagues (1991) empirically examined this relationship and found that people perceive attractive individuals as more successful, happy and confident in contrast to their perceived less attractive subjects. People have been trained to think that beauty and goodness are interdependent, one supports the other. "Perceived good-looking people are assumed to encompass the preferred virtues of humankind" (p. 109).

On the other hand, research has also uncovered some of the exceptions to the beauty-is-good stereotype. Dion (1981, 1986) suggested "that the beauty-is-good" effect is strongest for measures of social competence and interpersonal ease, and Bassili (1981) researched a similar problem and came to the conclusion that the core of the physical attractiveness stereotype is social vitality or extraversion. Research supported by Cash and Janda (1984) reports that some people are intimidated by attractive individuals and go as far as branding them as vain, self-centered and egotistical.

As Eagly and colleagues (1991) point out, many researchers have studied the effects of physical attractiveness and discovered two major implications: "one methodological and one theoretical" (p. 110, 1991). This study will focus on the theoretical implications; the physical attractiveness stereotype allows the "terms of existing psychological research on impression formation and stereotyping" (p. 110).

Research further suggests that attractive people have a distinct edge in the workplace; that is they are considered more confident and competent by interviewers and co-workers alike. According to Eagly and colleagues (1991)
“most research has addressed three broad questions on physical attractiveness: (a) Are attractive people perceived differently than unattractive people? (b) are attractive people treated differently than unattractive people? (c) Do attractive people have different characteristics (i.e. personality traits, skills, behavioral tendencies) than attractive people?” (p.110)

As Jawahar and Matteson (2005) state, “selection discussions are important to applicants, organizations, and the larger society. Selecting qualified applicants is key to an organization’s survival. Applicants and the larger society expect organizational selection decisions to be free from unfair discrimination” (p. 563). Applicants, organizations and society alike, expect hiring decisions to be based primarily on skill sets and credentials. Appearance should not profoundly impact an interviewer’s perception on a candidate’s abilities and talents to the point of not selecting a qualified candidate.

In a study conducted by Watkins and Johnson (2000), resumes of more attractive applicants were evaluated more favorably than resumes of less attractive applicants. According to Jawahar and Mattsson (2005), “Attractiveness may benefit both sexes to the same degree or to different degrees or the benefit of attractiveness may vary with the job type” (p. 564). This suggests the influence of sex-typed assumptions based on perceived attractiveness. There is a possibility that selection will be based solely on the job type. A candidate’s skills and credentials may not be taken into account if they are overshadowed by an interviewer’s perceptions.
On what basis do people deem others as attractive? Social environments and culture have a profound impact on personality and attractiveness. According to Eagly, et al, in relation to direct observation, individuals perceive that better looking people receive more attention and increased favorable reactions from others. "Perceivers may assume that these favorable reactions are elicited, not merely by people's good looks, but by other positive aspects of people's behavior and personality" (p. 112). During the interviewing process, better looking candidates are perceived to be more successful and adaptable possibly giving them an edge in the pursued job or position.

Depending upon the impact of popularity and preferential treatment on personality and behaviors, perceivers may assume that "physical attractiveness is correlated with various positive traits" (Eagly, et al, p. 111, 1991). This research suggests that along with attractiveness, perceived good looking candidates possess affirmative personal traits such as higher intelligence, self-confidence, and politeness.

Benefits of a Positive Self-Image

The manner in which an individual presents themselves directly affects perceptions, perceived job performance, and career success. This subject is relevant to the study since it highlights society's positive physical perceptions. By purveying a positive self-image through the display proper dress and attitude, interviewers and hiring managers are more likely to assume or perceive the candidate as confident and driven (Morem, 2005).
Although first impressions are not always dependable, the decision to hire someone is commonly made within the first few moments of an interview (Morem, 2005). First impressions are intrinsic, with a candidate’s physical appearance being the strongest factor in the assessment process. A positive first impression far outweighs a negative one. First impressions are lasting because they are powerful as psychologically they define who you are to the interviewer (Morem, 2005).

Confidence and positive self-image are related. People who feel good about themselves tend to reflect that high self-esteem by also demonstrating a significant belief in themselves. They reflect positive virtues such as pride, self-respect, credibility and convey a certain focus and professionalism. In addition, people who are confident have a tendency to make others feel good about themselves by providing a certain security. Relaying self-assuredness and remaining engaged are imperative during the interview process. The interviewer is much more likely to perceive a well-dressed, confident candidate as reliable and polished.

Morem has examined some of the behaviors that show how people demonstrate self-confidence. Morem identified five key components that make up a professional IMAGE framework. According each component is supported by the other. These five components work together to aid in exuding a positive professional image.
The five key components of professional IMAGE:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>Impression</th>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
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<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Grooming</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>Etiquette</td>
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Figure 2: Components of Image (Morem, 2005)

Promoting a positive self-image is clearly not based on appearance alone. The first component in Morem's IMAGE framework is impression. This depends largely on verbal and non-verbal cues. Verbal and non-verbal cues are interdependent upon one another when presenting for an interview. During the interview and initial meeting, a firm handshake, direct eye-contact, and posture are all forms of communication that have a direct impact on image and confidence.

The second component in Morem's IMAGE framework is movement. Body language and gestures are forms of communication that defines who you are. Emitting poor body-language can be a detriment to capturing a positive impression.

The third component in Morem's IMAGE framework is attitude is more important than skill (Buehler, 2004). A person's attitude is relevant to perception because it represents personal feelings and dispositions. It influences how a person acts and reacts to situations and change, which is directly related to impression formation.
The fourth component in Morem’s framework is grooming, including hair and attire are one of the initial impacts on perception. The way a person looks has a profound effect on others. Looking good and feeling good are interdependent. Taking pride in grooming hair and wearing the appropriate attire gives the perception of self-respect.

The fifth component in Morem’s framework is etiquette. This covers how you speak and react to situations. Knowing how to handle yourself and promoting the proper mannerisms can leave a lasting impression on others.

According to Morem (2005), many interviewers depend on non-verbal cues such as direct eye-contact, dress, personal grooming, sex and appearance as a major component in the assessment process whether they do so implicitly or explicitly. Many studies (e.g., Jawahar & Mattsson, 2005) have concluded that personal appearance has a direct influence on hiring and success outcomes. Attractive people tend to attain more successful positions in the workplace and exude more confidence in their perceivers’ eyes.

The presence on non-verbal cues and appearance have a substantial impact on the selection process. Although research (Jawahar & Mattsson, 2005) suggests that being attractive has numerous tangible and intangible benefits, it is possible to create a positive self-image (Morem, 2005) to possibly positively impact the perception of the interviewer.
Explanation and Tendencies of Self-Monitoring and the Perception of Self-Confidence

According to Robbins, "self-monitoring refers to a person's ability to adjust his or her behavior to external situational factors" (1993 p. 714). Those high in self-monitoring show substantial adaptability in their behavior and are more likely to be perceived as confident. These individuals are highly sensitive to external signs and can behave differently dependant upon the situation. They are capable of producing noticeable contradictions between the public norms and the private self. On the other hand, low self-monitors can not camouflage themselves this way; they tend to show their true dispositions and attitudes in every situation; therefore there is obvious behavioral constancy between who they are privately and what they do publicly (Robbins, 1993 p. 714).

People who are better able to adjust their personalities to fit a given situation are more adaptable. This is a chameleon-like quality. High self-monitoring individuals have increased self-awareness and confidence. For instance, during a challenging interview, high self-monitoring individuals are more likely able to be composed and engaged verses those individuals with low-self monitoring tendencies who will most likely show they are challenged or concerned.

Snyder, Berscheid & Matwychuk (1988) report that high self-monitoring individuals in most cases adapt to the situation at hand; they are "sensitive and responsive to interpersonal and situational specifications of behavioral
appropriateness" (p. 972). They "use the information to monitor and control the images of self that they project to others in social situations" (p. 972). High self-monitoring individuals have a tendency to be concerned with their own public appearances and the perception of others in regards to the images conveyed by the people they associate with (1988). High self-monitoring people place a greater emphasis on their appearance and behavior in relation to situations and are more likely to be successful during an interview and lay the foundation for a good first impression.

On the other hand, according to research interpreted by Snyder, Berscheid & Matwychuk (1988) low self-monitoring individuals display less concern with "tailoring their behavior to fit situational and interpersonal considerations" (p. 972). These individuals are more concerned with the feelings and attitudes of others, rather than themselves and their appearance (1988). Snyder, Berscheid & Glick state "When initiating dating relationships, low self-monitoring individuals were particularly concerned with the personality attributes of potential partners" (1985 p. 223). These individuals are less likely to invest in proper grooming and dress for an interview.

Most hiring managers and decision makers are expected to be aware of the legal implications of discrimination in selection (Heilman & Stopek, 1995). In a study conducted by Heilman & Stopek (1985), on whether appearances influence an individual's corporate success, results indicated that attractiveness surprisingly, had different outcomes on the degree to which the success or detriment of the applicant's attractiveness attributed to their personal skills and
abilities. In a study by Dipboye, Arvey & Terpstra (1977), data confirmed that those who were perceived attractive had an advantage when assessed during an interview.

The effects of attractiveness have not been shown to be unanimously favorable. Women who have been perceived as attractive (Heilman & Stopek, 1988) seemed to be at a disadvantage due to their appearance when applying for management jobs.

In summary according to Heilman & Stopek’s (1988) findings, “Attractiveness also has proven to be a distinct disadvantage for managerial women when their work is evaluated and recommendations for organizational rewards are made” (p. 379, 1985).

Clearly, people form perceptions from the onset and are more likely to stick with their initial impression. Overall, the past research and evidence presented in this study demonstrates the benefits of attractiveness and a positive self-image during the initial impression formation process and how it should affect the interview decisions. The benefits of attractiveness promote self-pride and self-respect. Furthermore, individuals deemed as attractive are perceived to be focused and responsible.

The way an individual presents during an interview affects perceived job performance and career success, which increases personal credibility. Interviews are the beginning of a personal relationship; therefore non-verbal cues such as firm handshakes and personal grooming are essential for presentation. Non-verbal communication is extremely impacting during an interview and the
initial impression formation processes. Attractive people may be perceived as more successful and confident but selection is also dependent upon an individual's ability and interview skills such as being engaged and remaining focused.

This study investigated the relationship between perceptions of applicant attractiveness, job performance, applicant confidence, and most importantly selection decisions. Five candidates were asked a series of interview questions based on research and theory. They were asked a series of questions focused on the effect of applicant appearance on hiring decisions, perceptions of job performance and perceptions of applicant confidence.
Chapter 3

Methodology

Chapter 3 outlines the qualitative findings used to gather data from the experienced participants who were interviewed for the study. A brief assessment of this study will be provided followed by information about the participants interviewed for the study. The chapter finishes by delivering the feedback and data gathered regarding the qualitative findings.

Design

This qualitative study consisted of interviews with HRD Professionals that were responsible for hiring and recruitment. The researcher conducted individual face to face interviews for approximately one hour in length.

Participants

Individuals were chosen for their insight and candid responses regarding the subject matter. Participants met the following criteria: a) they have interviewed 25 or more candidates during the last year, b) they have hired 15 or more applicants during the last year, and c) they must assess overall professional appearance during the interviewing process.

The participants were then recruited through referrals from alumni, current students and faculty in the St. John Fisher College Graduate Human Resource Development program. The participants all came from different backgrounds and companies. A brief summary of each participant and their respected organization is provided in Figure 1. Figure 1 offers a brief overview on the organization’s
function and size, each participant’s job description and how each participant was dressed during the interview.

Figure 1 provides a brief overview of each participant’s organization, job description and their appearance during the interview by the researcher.

Figure 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization Description</th>
<th>Participant’s Job Description</th>
<th>Appearance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large health care agency that delivers home care and hospice services. Employs approximately 1200</td>
<td>Recruits professional, clerical and home health aides</td>
<td>Professional dress; jacket and skirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-sized information technology company offering premier wireless services</td>
<td>Recruits Information Technology professionals and engineers</td>
<td>Casual; off the shoulder top and broomstick printed skirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community job assistance program funded by federal government. Employs 65</td>
<td>Manages the daily operations of a federally funded employment agency</td>
<td>Professional dress; pant suit with matching accessories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large optical health care company providing numerous products worldwide. Employs thousands</td>
<td>Recruits scientist and engineers</td>
<td>Business casual; sweater and slacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct marketing company specializing in beauty, health, wellness products. Employs 12,000</td>
<td>Recruits home-based distributors for direct sales business.</td>
<td>Professional dress; pant suit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedure

Participants evaluated photographs of one of four versions of potential job candidates’ personal appearance: (1) dressed-down, (2) business, casual, (3) conservative business dress (4) moderately conservative business dress wear.
Participants have shown demonstrated experience in personnel assessment, hiring and interviewing.

The qualitative interviews were conducted at each individual’s workplace for approximately one hour. The interviews covered a series of questions targeted at impression formation, hiring decisions and if dress can affect a candidate’s confidence. Participants were given one week to prepare for the interview by receiving the questions via e-mail. They were allowed to ask questions or request clarification. The following questions were directed to each participant:

Figure 2 Qualitative Research Questions

1. What do you think really creates a lasting positive first impression from a job candidate? What about a lasting negative first impression?

2. What three things do you consider to be the most important when assessing a candidate during the interviewing process?

3. When interviewing candidates for your open positions, how would you expect them to dress? What would you think if they were instead dressed in either traditional attire or business casual attire when interviewing [depending on the response to the previous]?

4. Does your organization consider professional appearance as a key factor?

5. Think of a person who you feel would be successful in your organization. [give participant a few seconds]. Describe in detail how you imagine the person is dressed.

6. [Present two pictures; see Appendix]. After looking at these pictures, can you
7. Which seems more confident? Why?
8. Do you perceive a well-dressed candidate as a more confident candidate?
9. Can you make an honest, quality assessment by basing your opinion solely on a candidate's personal appearance?

The researcher was the sole interviewer during the interviewing process. Professionals who hire and interview recruits were selected for the study. Each participant was provided with an informed consent that was approved by the Internal Review Board and was also guaranteed confidentiality and that the findings would only be used for this study.

Five professionals were then interviewed. Face to face interviewing allowed a personal exchange of information and allows an interviewer to assess a candidate directly. Each participant was asked the same set of questions (see Figure 2). Interviewing was used because it gave access to the insights and observations of others (Weiss, 1994). Through interviewing, researchers can learn about foreign subject matter. Interviewing also gives insight on culture, values and other people's experiences.

Qualitative data gathering was the preferred and best way to gather information from the participants for this study. The participants were able to offer solid explanations and reasoning on the hiring and selection process. The use of one-on-one interviews provided insight on each participant's detail and
thought process. A quantitative study would not have allowed the researcher to capture the detail and perception discussion necessary for this study.

The pictures presented (Appendix) were chosen by the researcher based on the social norms of business casual and professional dress. Men and women were depicted in the pictures to represent both sexes. The pictures were presented in random pairs. There were a total of six randomly selected pictures that met the criteria of business casual and professional dress.
Chapter 4

Results

Purpose of Study

This study examined whether hiring professionals make judgments based on professional appearance. An investigative interview approach was used to examine the perceptions of professionals responsible for selection and recruitment about the appearance of applicants. Chapter 4 details the results of these interviews with employers asking about their expectations, perceptions and the impact of appearance in the workplace. The professionals were asked a series of questions focused on the effect of appearance in the workplace (see Figure 2). This chapter provides an overview of the responses and is organized around the questions that were asked. There were profound differences and subtle similarities in the responses provided.

Question 1

The first interview question was *What do you think really creates a lasting positive first impression from a job candidate?* What about a lasting negative first impression? Table 1 details the responses to Question 1.

*Table 1. Detailed responses to the first interview question*

| Participant 1 | Good eye-contact, responses to situational based interviews, check for good listening, and overall body language. To a certain extent personal appearance, how detailed the applicant is. Body odor and poor eye |
contact are detriments.

Participant 2  Overall presentation; firm handshake, eye contact. Cockiness, know-it-alls, asking inappropriate questions and over talking the interviewer all leave negative lasting impressions.

Participant 3  Neatness and a professional appearance; clean cut for men, well groomed for a female. Basically to be dressed for the position they are applying for. I prefer traditional business attire for interviews. Should the candidate chew gum, have a non-approachable demeanor, poor diction, receiving phone calls (cell) during the interview would leave a negative first impression.

Participant 4  A candidate would leave a lasting positive first impression if he/she was dressed professionally, was personable, showed enthusiasm, and being technically qualified for the role. A candidate would leave a negative impression if he/she did not dress professionally, was unenthusiastic, and was just generally disheveled in appearance.

Participant 5  A lot of it is non-verbal communication. The majority is based upon eye-contact, body language, body posture, facial impressions. The candidate would leave a negative first impression by showing no enthusiasm, no smiling a lot of non-verbal communication, being late, underdressed.

The responses to Question 1 show the importance of non-verbal cues to interviewers. As can be seen in the responses, non-verbal communication sets
the perception and actual tone from the beginning of the interview. For example, one participant indicated that he/she was looking for a “firm handshake, eye contact.” Another was looking for general professionalism in the interview, saying that “receiving phone calls (cell) during the interview would leave a negative first impression.” The responses clearly highlight the value of non-verbal cues and a professional presentation as problems can be a definite detriment in the assessment of the interviewer. Thus, applicants should practice perception checks before interviewing for to make sure they are staying focused and maintaining good eye contact.

Question 2

The second interview question was, What three things do you consider to be the most important when assessing a candidate during the interviewing process? Table 2 details the responses to Question 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Listening, communication skills, knowledge and qualifications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>How they answered the interview questions, the time they take to think and respond. Not too hasty, eye contact. I prefer for candidates to ask for the job to tell they’re generally interested, ask culture questions about our organization; come prepared by visiting the website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Three most important things when assessing candidate during interview process are qualification for the position, professionalism and the candidate’s demeanor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant 4  It depends on the job, but attitude is almost everything; does the candidate know how to communicate, the ability to work well with people, flexibility. Attitude is part of the job. Expertise in one's particular field.

Participant 5  Eye contact, good listening habits (hear the interviewer out), good posture.

The responses to Question 2 highlight the importance of a candidate's overall presentation of him or herself during the interview. The key themes that recurred include: the importance of attitude (demeanor), discussions about qualifications, and the importance of good communication. Remaining engaged during the interviewing process is imperative to show a vested interest in the desired position, as one respondent pointed out “how they answered the interview questions, the time they take to think and respond. Not too hasty, eye contact. I prefer for candidates to ask for the job to tell they’re generally interested, ask culture questions about our organization; come prepared by visiting the website.” The responses discuss the significance of a candidate’s attitude and skill. None of the responses provided discussed appearance.

Question 3

The third interview question was, *When interviewing candidates for your open positions, how would you expect them to dress? What would you think if they were instead dressed in either traditional attire or business casual attire*
when interviewing [depending on the response to the previous]? Table 3 details the responses to Question 3.

**Table 3. Detailed responses to the third interview question**

| Participant 1 | That's a tough one as it depends on the job. I won't take points off for dressing in uniform, scrubs but I do expect them to be neat and clean. Cleavage exposure is unacceptable. We recently interviewed a nurse from Nevada who had a casual demeanor and dress. The hiring manager was impressed with experience rather than appearance. Most come dressed in business casual; Physical, Occupational, Speech Therapists and Nurses. The culture here is business casual; it depends on the culture to make a good first impression. |
| Participant 2 | It varies; I've been in the IT industry so long that I'm used to casual and business attire, business casual is acceptable. Usually those dressed in suits are more professional but as long as the candidate is dressed appropriately with no mini skirts and shows moderation. |
| Participant 3 | Since I recruit mainly for scientist and engineering openings I would expect candidates to dress professionally [men in a suit, or shirt, tie, & sports jacket. Women in a suit or other professional dress]. If the candidate arrived dressed casually or in business casual attire then I would think that they did not have a lot of experience with interviewing and did not prepare themselves appropriately for the interview, unless they were advised they could dress in casual attire. |
| Participant 4 | I expect them to dress really one to two steps above the job they've
applied for. Appearance and dress are part of the non-verbal communication that first impression is hard to overcome in the interviewing process. I think we've become too casually dressed in today's job market.

We've had a candidate who applied for a counselor position; come in what I consider dressed down in a jumpsuit. I really had a hard time getting past that because if she's dressed like that for an interview, what will she come dressed into work everyday? I even have a problem with a potential interviewee asking what the dress code is. That sets red flags.

Participant 5 I would expect them to dress in traditional business attire. I would give that person some thought if they were dressed business casual but would be a little more hesitant in hiring them.

The responses to Question 3 reflected the differences in personal perceptions among hiring managers. Specifically, expectations regarding dress differed greatly between causal and traditional business attire. Responses varied depending on organizational culture and job function. Three out of five participants expressed the importance of and their preference for traditional business dress over business casual. One of these participants discussed the importance of dressing "two steps above the position the job they've applied for". The other two participants did not express appearance as a value, as their organizational cultures permit business casual; it's considered the norm.
Applicants may want to pay close attention to their attire when interviewing for a potential position in order to set a good first impression, it's imperative to look professional.

Question 4

The fourth interview question was, Does your organization consider professional appearance as a key factor? Table 4 details the responses to Question 4.

Table 4. Detailed responses to the fourth interview question

| Participant 1 | No. We want our employees to be comfortable and functional. We deliver health care and services to homes. Nurses and caregivers would not be comfortable in professional dress. Home health aides were uniforms. |
| Participant 2 | Business casual is a key factor, when working in this type (IT) industry jeans and sneakers are acceptable. Administration are more professional |
| Participant 3 | In my experience professional appearance is a key factor in my organization. The organization allows us to dress in business casual attire while at work performing our daily duties, but if we travel or have client site visits with our department, we are expected to dress accordingly, depending on the function. |
| Participant 4 | I believe staff feel that after several internal battles since some staff are interfacing with external customers while others don't; it does present some distance within the organization when it comes to functions and |
role models; what people do. Most staff are adamant in believing their
dress does not impact their overall performance. In fact, when they are
dressed comfortably they actually feel they are performing better. I think
it impacts my management view of their performance. Fridays are even
more casual than the rest of the week; no jeans or sneakers but very
casual attire. The other issue in the business community and
workplace. Many of the large corporations don’t even dress
professional, I see that many companies have changed their dress
policies to be more casual. If I had things my way, we’d be dressing
more formal here.

Participant 5 Of course. Those who are professionally dressed in my experience
seem to be more reliable, driven and successful.

The responses to Question 4 vary from profession and organization.
Overall, appearance is a key factor outlined by the participants and their
organizations. The extent to which appearance is a key factor differed slightly
depending on function and organizational culture. For example, Participant #1
answered “no,” and clarified that uniforms must be worn by care givers. The
impact of perception was highlighted by two other participants. Both supported
the theory of the perception of the relation between professional dress and
success. In fact, one participant said that “those who are professionally dressed
in my experience seem to be more reliable, driven, and successful.” Potential
candidates should pay close attention to the correlation of professional dress and
success.
Question 5

The fifth interview question was, *Think of a person who you feel would be successful in your organization. [give participant a few seconds]. Describe in detail how you imagine the person is dressed.* Table 5 details the responses to Question 5.

*Table 5. Detailed responses to the fifth interview question.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 1</th>
<th>Wearing a short sleeved golf shirt, khaki pants, name badge properly displayed and sneakers.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>That's tough, business casual is the norm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>This question is a little difficult to answer because I believe that successful people do not have to look a certain way. That being said, many of the people in upper management in my organization typically choose to dress professionally. Typically senior managers wear suits or, at the very least, a shirt and tie for men. Most women in senior roles wear business suits with either a skirt or slacks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>I think for women it would be a tailored skirt or pants and blouse, jacket, stockings and short pumps; minimal jewelry and makeup. For a gentleman it would be a shirt and tie, not necessarily a jacket with some kind of tailored pants and polished shoes; a quality haircut. Pretty conservative, no tattoos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>The person is dressed in a nice suit and tie (male). Skirt or pant suit, stockings and accessories to match (female).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The responses to Question 5 varied considerably among participants. Instead of identifying one or two key themes, they offered somewhat conflicting responses on what a successful candidate would be wearing. On one hand, individuals dressed casual are considered successful. This is because of organizational norms and culture. Depending on industry, dress and appearance differ greatly. On the other hand, professional dress is the expectation for success. Participants who had this expectation believed that those who dressed more professional acted more professional. Dressing in traditional attire had a profound impact on impression. One participant helped to clarify this apparent conflict by stated the difficulty of basing success on the way an individual is dressed. He said that “I believe that successful people do not have to look a certain way.” Thus, the perception of appropriate appearance varies from organization but it is clear that if candidates should err, it should be on the side of being more professionally dressed rather than business causal when presenting for an interview.

Question 6

The sixth interview question was, [Present two pictures; see Appendix]. After looking at these pictures, can you tell me which person you would hire? Why?

Table 6 details the responses to Question 6.

Table 6. Detailed responses to the sixth interview question.

Participant 1 [Presented A & E] E is dressed more suited to our organization’s culture; not overdressed, comfortable. E probably called ahead to inquire about
our dress code.

Participant 2 [Presented pictures B and C] Hire both- dress/ first appearance is important. Students come to interview usually dressed like B. If a professional came dressed like B or C, it would be acceptable as both are fine.

Participant 3 [Presented pictures D and F] After looking at the two pictures I cannot state which person I would hire. Their manner of dress does not tell me about their qualifications for the position. However, the gentleman with the suit appears more professional, confident, and eager. The gentleman in the business casual attire appears a bit more subdued and casual. Picture D is typically how many people in my organization dress on a day-to-day basis but if someone were interviewing I would expect them to dress like the person in picture F.

Participant 4 [Presented pictures A and E] I'd hire A over E because of the tailored suit. I don't believe women should have to wear skirts only as suggested in the past to interviews. E is a casual two piece suit but it's not tailored. A is carrying a briefcase which also looks more professional. E is wearing glasses and the perception is that people who wear glasses are smarter than people without but that doesn't phase me at all.

Participant 5 [Presented pictures C and B]. I would hire the person dressed in the outfit in picture B because the attire is more professional and polished. If a candidate came dressed in the clothing in picture C, I'd be apt to
Responses to Question 6 allowed the Participants to choose who they would hire based on appearance and first impressions. When discussing why participants would choose one particular candidate, the responses did relay the importance of appearance and perception. Three out of five participants did express their preference for candidates dressed professionally rather than casual. “However, the gentleman with the suit appears more professional, confidant, and eager. The gentleman in the business casual attire appears a bit more subdued and casual.” Although one participant stated they were unable to make a decision based on a picture only because the “manner of dress does not tell me about their qualifications for the position”. The same participant did state the perception of confidence based on appearance including dress. Applicants should take into account the impact of dress on the perception of confidence.

Question 7

The seventh interview question was, Which seems more confident? Why?

Table 7 details the responses to Question 7.

Table 7. Detailed responses to the seventh interview question.

| Participant 1 | [Pictures A and E] I think they are both fairly confident but candidate A is looking directly at you; good eye contact. |
| Participant 2 | [Pictures A and E] These candidates are not from the normal workforce; they both look very confident. E is business casual with a twist, A has a |
briefcase both show confidence.

Participant 3  [Pictures D and F] The person in picture F seems more confident, not only because of the way he’s dressed but also by the way he’s carrying himself. He’s smiling and his overall demeanor just appears more confident. The man in picture D is dressed more casual and his body language (hands in pockets, the way he’s standing) tells me that he’s not as confident as the other gentleman.

Participant 4  [Pictures A and F] I would say A because her body language looks more confident.

Participant 5  [Pictures B and C] The attire in B seems more confident because obviously the person who chose these clothes took a lot of thought about making a good first impression. Although the attire in C isn’t in poor taste, it is quite sporty, which does not set a professional tone.

The responses to Question 7 clearly show that perception of confidence are based on both the physical appearance of applicants and their non-verbal cues. Regardless of the participants’ selection, all five discussed the importance of body language and posture. As the responses show, non-verbal communication takes precedence when assessing the perception of confidence. For example, one participant indicated that the individuals in the pictures looked “both fairly confident but candidate A is looking directly at you; good eye contact.” To this participant, eye contact was the key indicator of confidence. Another stated, “the man in picture D is dressed more casual and his body language (hands in
pockets, the way he's standing) tells me that he's not as confident as the other gentleman;" this second participant emphasized posture rather than eye contact. Regardless, the responses clearly highlight the value of non-verbal cues in relation to the perception of confidence. Thus, applicants should be self-aware of the non-verbal cues they are displaying to avoid looking less confident.

*Question 8*

The eighth interview question was *Do you perceive a well-dressed candidate as a more confident candidate?* Table 8 details the responses to Question 8.

*Table 8.* Detailed responses to the eighth interview question.

| Participant 1 | No. First impressions are lasting; but they can also be deceiving, a well-dressed candidate may not always be a promise. Clothes do help promote confidence but cannot hide skills and experience. |
| Participant 2 | Somewhat. It shows a person takes more time and effort into their appearance. I feel I'm less productive when I'm dressed down. I'm not sure if that's related to confidence but if I wore jeans all the time I wouldn't be productive; when dressed more professionally, I'm down to business. |
| Participant 3 | A well-dressed candidate typically appears more confident but body language, personality, and overall demeanor contribute to determining whether or not a person is confident. Attire gives a positive first impression but it's not the only thing that shows confidence. |
| Participant 4 | Yes. A well-dressed candidate seems to have more experience in the |
marketplace and seem be a more reliable source for expertise due to their experience. It would seem one who dresses for the position desired is more dedicated and dependable.

Participant 5 I think a person who’s well dressed could feel more confident and perform better at an interview. So yes I do perceive hem as being more confident.

The responses to Question 8 demonstrate the importance of professional dress in relation to perceived confidence. Four out of five participants discussed the importance of being well-dressed and feeling confident on communicating positive first impressions. As one participant stated: “I think a person who’s well dressed could feel more confident and perform better at an interview. So yes I do perceive him as being more confident.” The lone participant who disagreed even agreed in part when he/she expressed that “first impressions are lasting.” However, this participant further qualified the statement by saying “but they can also be deceiving, a well-dressed candidate may not always be a promise.” Thus, applicants should dress professional to demonstrate that they feel professional.

Question 9

The ninth interview question was, Can you make an honest, quality assessment by basing your opinion solely on a candidate’s personal appearance?

Table 9 details the responses to Question 9.

Table 9. Detailed responses to the ninth interview question.

Participant 1 No. It wouldn’t be wise; ask poignant questions; how they’ve handled
conflict, ask for references, background checks must come into play. If we would have based our assessment on appearance alone, I'm sure we would have missed out on some great candidates.

Participant 2 No. It doesn't go into experience and qualifications. Dress is personal style. Financial reasons may prevent people from being able to afford a suit and briefcase.

Participant 3 I would not be able to make an honest, quality assessment of someone simply by his/her appearance. As mentioned previously, there are many more factors to consider when assessing a candidate, such as demeanor, knowledge, personality, etc.

Participant 4 No. There is more to the job than just looking the part. I do think looking the part helps a lot but also in tough job market you have a lot of talented candidates so it's important to have skill and experience.

Participant 5 No. Because this is something that cannot be assessed on just looks. A candidate needs the experience, skills, interpersonal skills and by judging a book by its cover, you could end up really wrong about the candidate. Resumes, credentials are all things to consider when assessing a candidate.

The responses to Question 9 all concurred that an honest, quality assessment could not be made based solely on a candidate's appearance. The participants stated that skill, knowledge and experience were essential factors for candidates to possess. Basing a decision on appearance alone would not be
sensible. Appearance is important but it is not an overall determining factor on hiring decisions. Applicants should come dressed appropriately for the position desired but also be knowledgeable, skilled and experienced.

This section will provide an overview on the reoccurring themes given by the participants. There were some similarities and common themes between the participants.

Key themes are listed in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>→ Non verbal communication is paramount. All five participants discussed the importance of eye contact, staying focused and being engaged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Good listening skills being engaged are a plus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ First impressions are indeed lasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Dress is important but it is not everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Confidence, knowledge and strong interpersonal skills are extremely beneficial during the interview process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The key themes identified in this study discuss the perceptions and feelings of the impact of appearance in relation to confidence, job performance and ultimately hiring decisions. The results were conflicting with many of the researched perceptions on the appearance especially the "what is beautiful is good" theory. Although appearance is important, this study uncovered that it did not profoundly impact hiring decisions. This study identified that professional dress as the preferred during the initial interview process, casually dressed
individuals were not ruled out or considered as less professional candidates contingent upon dress.

Non-verbal communication outweighed appearance and verbal communication as a determinant in the interview process. All five participants discussed its relevance and stated the impact non-verbal cues have on the actual tone on the interview as well as the perception of the individuals interviewing. Emitting a positive attitude through non-verbal cues such as good posture, appearing focused through accurate listening and engaged far outweighed looks alone.

The findings to the first two questions highlighted the importance on non-verbal communication and reflect some of the desired qualities of candidates during the interviewing process. First impressions are lasting but as one participant stated, not a guarantee for a qualified applicant. In order for applicants to be considered as qualified or hirable, skill, experience and confidence factor in. In order for a candidate to be perceived as confident, that individual must be able to reflect assuredness and professionalism including professional dress and a positive self-image.

Participants also discussed the importance of the existence of soft skills during the interview process. When candidates reflect they possess interpersonal and problem-solving skills, they are more likely to have an edge during the interview process. This is consistent with key finding #5, which outlines the benefits of interpersonal skills and past experience.
Chapter 5

Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Summary of study's key findings

Chapter 5 will summarize the study's key findings. This study uncovered opposing views on the effect of appearance on hiring decisions, job performance and confidence. The overall theme this study discovered was that good looks are significant in the assessment process during interviews but good looks are not a guarantee for selection or direct hiring. Non-verbal cues are paramount in the hiring decision process; these participants reported that the non-verbal cues seem to weigh more heavily than appearance. Regardless, an individual's skill-sets and past experiences remain crucial for candidates to possess when interviewing.

Non-verbal communication

All five participants expressed the importance of non-verbal communication and cues. Although physical appearance was discussed as being important, participants were adamant about the impact that non-verbal cues had on the impressions they formed. Specifically, respondents discussed the impact of nonverbal cues such as good eye-contact, firm handshakes, and being engaged in listening. These cues have a profound impact on the assessment and first impression process.

The participants also expressed the importance of non-verbal cues in setting the actual tone of the interview. The presence of non-verbal cues such as
good-eye contact and appearing to be engaged can make or break what happens later in the interview and subsequently the hiring decision. Applicants should take heed to how they are presenting themselves through non-verbal cues.

The findings to the first research question discussed what created an overall positive first impression versus a negative first impression. The responses reflected that non-verbal cues were paramount when making hiring decisions as they set the tone and overall impression of the candidate.

Question #2 also targeted the subject of non-verbal cues. Applicant sincerity and skill were two themes that were discussed. Appearance was discussed but did not profoundly impact hiring decisions. Providing a firm-handshake and good eye-contact helped promote the perception of confidence and a positive-self image.

Attire

The findings on the impact of attire greatly differed between participants. Business casual and traditional attire preferences were discussed in detail. The findings uncovered that in interviews traditional business attire remains a preferred method of dressing over casual business attire because the overall impression of confidence and positive self-image is delivered by the candidate when presenting for an interview.

Organization culture and job function also played a role in the preference of business casual attire over traditional business attire. One participant discussed the importance of feeling comfortable over looking good. Those in the
information technology and healthcare industries are accustomed to business casual in the workplace. Thus, the participants who represented these fields expressed business casual as an organizational norm rather than a detriment.

Although there were opposing views on the importance of attire, the majority of the participants agreed dressing and looking professional in traditional attire is preferred over presenting for an interview in business causal attire.

Overall appearance, including the impact of attire, was considered an organizational key factor based on the responses provided by all five participants. The degree in which it impacted impressions differed slightly. Candidates should dress for the position they desire rather than the position they are in. It is imperative to remember that individuals not only represent their organization but themselves as well. Exuding a positive self-image through attire is a personal and organization value that can leave a lasting impression during the interviewing process and well beyond.

Responses to Question #5 varied dependant upon organizational culture and norms. The ultimate decisions were based upon personal preference, which was influenced by organizational culture, values and norms. Based on the responses, applicants have a better chance of setting a lasting positive first impression by presenting to an interview in professional business attire rather than business casual.

*The Perception of Confidence*

The responses based on Question #6 discussed the impact of appearance on confidence. Though participants cautioned basing an assessment solely on
appearance alone, they did agree confidence and appearance were correlated. When a candidate presents to interview well groomed and dressed, they are potentially more likely to feel good about themselves; this is reflected by demonstrating more self-assuredness and confidence.

According to the participants in this study, the perception of confidence is further validated when a candidate is perceived to have taken time to look presentable and professional for an interview. Participants did point out that while a decision could not be based upon the pictures presented, the overall attitudes of the subjects were reflected based upon appearance such as dress.

Finally, question #7 further highlights the importance of appearance and non-verbal cues on the perception of confidence. Body language, posture and direct eye contact were all considered paramount when assessing a candidate's appearance in relation to the perception of confidence. When candidates come prepared, engaged, and dressed professionally for an interview, they are more likely to promote a positive first impression than those who reflect no interest and negative non-verbal cues such as limp handshakes, arrogance, and an unenthusiastic demeanor during the interviewing process.

Although confidence is an ideal trait, it is clearly not a guarantee of a job during the interview process. The responses to Question #8 conveyed the importance of professional dress in relation to perceived confidence. The majority of the participants discussed the importance of being well-dressed and feeling confident on communicating positive first impressions. Although
participants discussed that appearance is important, the significance of skill and experience outweighed physical appearance.

Responses to Question # 8 addressed the importance of addressed in relation to perceived confidence. The majority of the participants agreed that well-dressed candidates were perceived as confident. When individuals take the time and come across as being concerned with their attire and personal expressions, participants agreed they are more likely to be perceived as confident, professional and reliable. There was one skeptical comment from one participant, cautioning against judging based upon appearance and dress alone but the same participant did agree that personal image is important when assessing confidence.

Many of the findings in this study uncovered some similarities with past research perceptions but also offered some contradictory indications as well such as the results in Questions # 8 and #9. The suggestion of the importance of appearance is discussed in Question #8 as it relates to perceived confidence and professionalism. The responses to Question #9 focused on the importance of soft-skills and experience in relation to appearance. Participants agreed that while appearance is important, skill, experience and knowledge were necessary to make a profound impact on the interviewer.

Implications Roots of Sex-Typed Assumptions

Research from Gillen (1981) has established that attractiveness benefits gender characterizations. Historically, women who are perceived as attractive are assumed to be more feminine. On the other hand, a perceived attractive or
handsome male is considered to be more masculine than less attractive men (Rosenkranz, et al. 1968). According to Heilman (1983), "simply on the basis of appearance, then, the person-job fit seems particularly good for attractive males and their prospect for success bright, but the person-job fit seems poor indeed for attractive females and their prospects for success are judged to be quite dim" (p. 380).

People have a tendency to group males and females into job-specific roles in relation to gender (Heilman & Stopek, 1985). Based on their perceptions of gender traits, "the better the perceived fit between the individual's characteristics and the job requirements then the more favorable is the prognosis for on-the-job success" (p. 380, 1985).

Past research supports that attractiveness and sex of applicants (Cash, Gillen & Burns, 1977) influence evaluations of applicants when they apply to sex-type jobs. Most individuals are likely to instinctively group or stereotype and group individuals on the basis of their immediate, prominent features such as appearance (Allport, 1954; Brewer, 1988; Miller, 1988; Stangor, Lynch, Duan & Glass, 1992). "Because stereotypes guide our responses, acceptance and rejection decisions in a selection context could very well be influenced by stereotypes" (p. 563 Jawahar & Mattsson, 2005).

Heilman (1985) reports, on the notion of appearance, because most high-level, executive, organizational positions are "masculinely sex-typed: that is they are filled predominantly by men and are believed to require uniquely masculine skills and talents for success" (p. Shein, 1973). This helps explain why studies
have shown attractive women have been found to be underprivileged by their looks and attractive men have an advantage because of their appearance when applying for managerial positions.

There are two general types of factors that are standard in relation to stereotyping: Direct observations of attractive and unattractive individuals in one's social surroundings, and exposure to cultural norms of attractive and unattractive people (Eagly, et al, 1991). When considering direct observation, perceivers observe that more attractive individuals receive favor in forms of reactions from others such as being more popular or better liked. In regards to culture, Eagly, et al (1991) proposed that the “American Culture associates beauty with good things and ugliness with bad things.” Their study found that perceived attractive people were normally surrounded by positive settings exuding a confident attitude.

There is no direct or indirect correlation between portraying attractive people as successful in their careers, it could be coincidence but physical attractiveness is not usually linked with high intelligence. “People depicted as outstanding in intellect or accomplishment are not uniformly good-looking, nor are good-looking people necessarily portrayed as smart and accomplished” (Eagly, et al, 1991).

Tips for Success

Never underestimate the power of non-verbal communication. Non-verbal cues and communication set the tone and the perception of the interview. The way a candidate reflects engagement and confidence are read through direct
eye-contact, posture, dress and facial expressions. Tips: practice in front of a mirror to see what others see. Try role-playing with a co-worker and ask for honest feedback on non-verbal cues.

Presenting professionally dressed will give you an edge. Although casual dress is a norm in today's workplace, it is better to err on the side of being professionally or conservatively dressed rather than casually for an interview. The participants agreed that professionally dressed candidates are perceived to be more confident and successful. Tip: individuals should dress in traditional business attire rather than business casual for interviews. Hiring managers are more likely to concede professionally dressed candidates as serious and driven.

Be confident and assertive, not complicated and aggressive. There is a fine line between feeling empowered and confident verses being overpowering and cocky. When individuals are well-dressed and attractive, they tend to reflect a certain self-awareness and assuredness. The participants cautioned against relying too heavily on just dress and attractiveness alone. Skills and experience are crucial to obtaining the job and leaving a lasting impression. Tip: Candidates should focus on experience and skills during the interview, being sure to seem over confident or cocky by interrupting the interviewer, remaining engaged and smiling often to reflect interest.

Implications for HRD practice

The effects of appearance on hiring decisions and how it relates to confidence and job performance has a major impact on selection decisions and perception. This study adds to the research and theories conducted on how
appearance specifically attractiveness and attire influence candidates and hiring managers. It highlights the importance of attire and skill, ways hiring managers can avoid making biased decisions on looks only. This study may help HRD practitioners to be aware of the importance of a positive self-image in relation to professionalism and future leaders.

Organizations should offer interviewing technique assistance to their hiring managers focusing on non-verbal cues, and avoiding sex-typed assumptions. Ensuring a diverse workforce in today's marketplace is paramount for survival. Hiring the right candidate for the right position must take precedence over gender. Organizations should offer literature and on-going training focused on the dangers of sex-typed assumptions. When hiring managers become self-aware of personal preferences and perceptions, they are more likely to avoid the mistake of judging a candidate on mode of dress, attractiveness and physical attributes.

Hiring managers should learn interviewing techniques to improve the interviewing process. By focusing on skills, experience and attitude with physical appearance as a secondary attribute, hiring managers and supervisors are more likely to make informed hiring decisions. Appearance is important because the candidate hired represents the organization but a balance must be achieved between appearance and skill sets. Since good-looking candidates are more likely to be perceived as confident and successful, hiring managers and supervisors must learn to look for experience and personal job success as part of the candidate's overall demeanor. Hiring managers and supervisors must also
remain self-aware during the interview process; avoiding personal preferences based on appearance and perception.

Conclusion

This study has explored the effect of applicant appearance on hiring decisions, perceptions of job performance and perceptions of applicant confidence both through literature research and interviews that were conducted at numerous organizations with professionals who participate in the decision-making process. The focus of this study was to investigate how appearance impacts perception and hiring decisions.

Candidates should focus on promoting a positive self-image which includes appearance, attire and non-verbal cues. Candidates should prepare for interviews by reviewing company literature with a strong emphasis on the organization’s values, vision and mission. It is paramount for candidates to leave a lasting impression by exuding confidence through experience, appearance and skill.
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