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# Impressions of Young Persons Wearing Hearing Aids and Eye Glasses

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## Impressions of Young Persons Wearing Hearing Aids and Eye Glasses

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First impressions are formed quickly, within milliseconds (ms) of exposure. Willis and Todorov (2006) found that only a 100ms exposure to a face was needed to make specific trait inferences, and research has demonstrated bias in judgements, stereotypes, and expected behaviors based on brief exposure. We make very quick judgements about another's intelligence (Bar et al., 2006), emotions, personality (Mast et al., 2011), competence, trustworthiness, likeability, and attractiveness (Willis & Todorov, 2006). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of persons wearing eye glasses or hearing aids.

While they are quite common, eye glasses still affect how we perceive the faces of the people wearing them. Leder et al. (2011) found that, analogous to the old stereotype, glasses can *still* lower perceived attractiveness and increase perceived intelligence and trustworthiness. Similarly, Terry and Kroger (1976) found that stimulus persons wearing glasses were rated less attractive compared to when they were not wearing glasses, particularly by survey participants who did not wear glasses or contacts themselves.

A diagnosis requiring the use of a hearing aid is different than glasses for two primary reasons. While one instantly experiences enhanced vision when donning a pair of glasses, acclimation to hearing aid input routinely requires adjustments to amplification, which may take months. There is no immediate "perfect" sensory enhancement (Munro, 2008). Secondly, stigma is an important underlying factor in the denial of hearing loss, resulting in refusal to wear a hearing aid because it is embarrassing and for fear that it is perceived as a sign of disability. In order to come to terms with the stigma of hearing loss, study participants acknowledged that they ultimately needed to redefine their self-image because people often mistake hearing loss for cognitive decline (Dawes et al., 2014).

**Methodology.** A web-based survey was deployed with students at two major universities in the south and southwestern U.S. Participants were asked to rate one male and one female model wearing each of two styles of glasses (heavy/dark plastic frames and lightweight wire frames) and two styles of hearing aids (flesh colored/larger/more visible and lighter/less visible), and as a control wearing neither glasses nor hearing aids. Backgrounds were removed from all images, and all poses were casual. A total of 592 participants completed the survey (67% female, 25% male; 39% White, 21% Hispanic, 15% Black; age range 17 to 56 (M=21); 60% of the respondents indicated they wear glasses and 0.5% indicated they wear a hearing aid.

A list of 25 impression adjectives from Kaigler-Evans and Damhorst (1978) were provided with each photograph. Subjects were asked to indicate their agreement with each of the adjectives for a model wearing a hearing aid, a model wearing glasses, and a control model. Factor analysis for the control models resulted in five descriptor factors with an acceptable reliability score: Reliable, Fashionable, Jovial, Provocative, and Good-Looking.

**Findings.** T-tests indicated significant differences between the control and both styles of glasses for both the male and female model with few exceptions. Generally, the male and female control models (without glasses) were rated more positively. However, there were fewer significant differences between the descriptors for the female's light frames and the control.

Another series of t-tests between the two hearing aid styles and the control indicated significant differences for the heavier, more visible hearing aid with the control model being rated higher on every factor except "reliable." There were almost no significant differences between the control and the light, less visible hearing aid for either the male or the female ("reliable" being the only significant factor).

**Conclusions.** Significant effects were computed for each of the factors for both male and female models for eye glasses style and for all but one factor for hearing aid style when compared to the control model. The data indicates that wearing glasses creates an impression different from not wearing glasses, and that the type of glasses worn also creates an impression different from not wearing glasses. Generally, the male was considered more reliable with glasses, but more fashionable, provocative and good-looking without glasses. The female was considered more reliable and jovial with heavy frames, but more fashionable, provocative and good-looking without glasses. With hearing aids, the heavier, more visible style has a less positive impression overall than the control model without a hearing aid. Notably, the light/less visible hearing aid did not differ significantly from the control model, except for one factor for the female model: reliability. This finding is encouraging, as hearing aid use has historically been associated with an impression of lower cognitive function. The fact that participants did not indicate a significant difference between the hearing aid use and the control may indicate stronger social acceptance, which supports reports recognizing Millennials as generally more socially accepting compared to older generations (e.g., Taylor & Keeter, 2010).

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