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In a world that is becoming dominated by multimedia, the likelihood of people being judged on snapshots of their appearance is increasing. Social networking, dating websites and online profiles all feature people's photographs, and subsequently convey a visual message to an audience. Whilst the salience of facial features is well documented, other factors, such as clothing, will also play a role in impression formation. Clothing can communicate an extensive and complex array of information about a person, without the observer having to meet or talk to the wearer. A person's attire has been shown to convey qualities such as character, sociability, competence and intelligence (Damhorst, 1990), with first impressions being formed in a fraction of a second (Todorov, Pakrashi, and Oosterhof, 2009). This study empirically investigates how the manipulation of small details in clothing gives rise to different first impressions, even those formed very quickly.

Damhorst (1990) states that 'dress is a systematic means of transmission of information about the wearer' (p. 1). A person's choice of clothing can heavily influence the impression they transmit and is therefore a powerful communication tool. McCracken (1988) suggests that clothing carries cultural meaning and that this information is passed from the 'culturally constructed world' to clothing, through advertising and fashion. Clothes designers can, through branding and marketing, associate a new product or certain designs with an established cultural norm (McCracken, 1988). How successful a product is in communicating information can depend on the knowledge of the audience. McCracken and Roth (1989) suggest that the potency of clothing communication relies on a 'code'. This code represents knowledge about social and cultural norms that members of communities or social groups share. The more people that understand the

code the more potent the clothing will be at communicating information. There remains, however, an outstanding question about which clothing features make an impact on impressions.

Appearance, posture and dress have all been found to communicate a range of personality traits, occupational and social roles. Elements of body posture and expressiveness are also strong visual cues. These include 'static' cues (such as height, appearance and clothing style) and 'dynamic' cues (such as facial expression, posture, body movement), all of which have been shown to communicate accurate impressions of personality (Naumann, Vazire, Rentfrow, and Gosling, 2009). When Johnson, Schofield, and Yurchisin (2002) explored, using open-ended interviews, how respondents formed first impressions they found clothing, type of suit, shoes, colour and fit of garments all constituted the information on which the observers based their judgement.

Global styles of dress have been shown to provide crucial information in impression formation. Teachers' assessments of student's intelligence, academic ability and behaviour have been shown to be affected by the pupil's clothing (Behling and Williams, 1991; Behling, 1995). Advertisers also capitalise on the powerful influence of clothing to sell products. For example, O'Neal and Lapitsky (1991) demonstrated that when a person was dressed suitably for a task depicted in an advertisement they were perceived as more credible by participants, who were also more likely to buy their products. As well as conveying personal attributes, such as sociability, and cognitive abilities like imagination (Damhorst, 1990), clothing also conveys information that people use to make inferences about personality. Paek (1986) manipulated the clothing style of a model from 'daring-conservative' to 'dressy-casual' and found they gave rise to markedly different personality attributions about the person.

Clothing has also been shown to enhance the wearer's own self-perception on a range of occupationally relevant attributes. Kwon (1994) asked men and women about the effect of clothing on judgements made in a working environment. Men held stronger beliefs than women about the impact of appropriate clothing in a professional setting. Men believed wearing the correct work attire increased the likelihood of them communicating that they were intelligent, competent, knowledgeable, honest and reliable. Clothing was the medium through which self-perception of these attributes was augmented. Support for this view comes from research showing that male clothing has a considerable effect on judgements of individual attributes. Bell (1991) tested perceptions of men dressed in four different styles of clothing (daring, conservative, formal, casual) on dimensions of attractiveness, intelligence and popularity. Each style variation communicated a different message resulting in a different combination of attributes. The formally dressed man received all positive judgements (attractive, intelligent and popular), whereas the casually dressed man created the least favourable impression (unattractive, unintelligent and unpopular). Although interesting, the effect global style changes have on person perception is hardly surprising given that the differences in clothing are considerably salient and informative. We ask whether, when these global differences are replaced by clothing styles with barely perceptible differences, the differences are still detectable and able to exert such a strong effect upon impressions.

Some previous research has attempted to investigate the effect of manipulating minor changes to clothing detail, but the conclusions have been hampered by methodological limitations. Damhorst and Reed (1986) changed the colour of clothing of female job applicants from light to dark and found differences in judgements. However, they also manipulated facial expressions (smiling vs serious), rendering any conclusions about the independent influence of colour on

perception equivocal. Fiore and DeLong (1984) showed that different styles of sweater give rise to different personality assessments, but participants saw the target garments presented alone and not worn by a model. Winakor and Navarro (1987) showed that shade of garments can affect preference but this was limited to clothes preference only and did not extend to the wearer. Rucker, Taber, and Harrison (1981) varied the style of female clothing in an interview scenario, manipulating features such as fit and neckline. They too detected differences in perception but the study is confounded by the inclusion of the wearers' faces, and facial information is known to heavily influence judgements.

Although the effect of minor clothing differences on impressions has been the focus of interest in the research cited, the methodological limitations limit the drawing of firm conclusions. In presenting visual stimuli to participants they either did not use real models, did not test person perception, were not time limited or did not obscure facial information when presenting clothes on models. At an empirical level this means one cannot rule out with confidence the effect of facial features, expression and attractiveness on perceptions. Also, in many real world situations impressions are formed in a very short period of time, often a matter of seconds so for ecological validity any empirical investigation should attempt to replicate this.

Every day people form first impressions of others; they do so rapidly and effortlessly. Complex judgements are made based on appearance in less than half a second (Olivola and Todorov, 2010a). Judgements about whether or not a person is trustworthy, for example, can be made in a fraction of a second (Todorov *et al.*, 2009). These judgements are consistent with those made without any time pressure (Todorov *et al.*, 2009). Some researchers have suggested that evolution may have equipped us with such rapid assessment tools since inferences about potentially threatening features are formed more quickly and consistently than are other features

(Bar, Neta, and Linz, 2006). These quick impressions can guide our assumptions about a number of traits a person has, such as attractiveness, likeability, competence, and aggressiveness (Willis and Todorov, 2006). A host of complex decisions, from choice of mate to which candidate to vote for in an election, are heavily influenced by appearance (Olivola and Todorov, 2010b). A large amount of information is aggregated to form these impressions and we hypothesise here that they will be influenced by subtle manipulations to clothing and appearance. Judgements may also be affected by the characteristics of the perceiver.

Judgements of others are often made relative to the self, and a person's own status may impact upon the judgements they make about others. Therefore we also investigate the role that the earnings of respondents play in the judgements of others based on their attire. When the target attire is a suit perceptions may be different for higher earning respondents whose profession affords them greater familiarity with this style of dress and with the social group likely to wear it (McCracken and Roth, 1989). Also, bespoke suit customers are likely to work in high level professional jobs that would attract an above average salary (Oliver, Bickle, and Shim, 1993). We therefore predict that the earnings of respondents will also impact impressions. The main aim of this study is to improve on previous methodology by investigating how minor changes in male attire can affect perception of the wearer using a real model, without facial information and with limited time exposure.

The target male attire is a bespoke suit and an off-the-peg suit of the same colour and material worn by the same faceless model. We ask whether such minor differences in detail convey different impressions to the perceiver, even when viewed for just five seconds. By measuring a range of personal, social and occupationally relevant attributes, we investigate whether people make snap judgements about traits for which they can have no evidence, such as flexibility,

based purely on brief exposure to the wearer's attire. Finally we investigate whether the earnings of the perceiver affect the perception of the suit wearer.

Our study tests three primary hypotheses:

1) *That people make rapid judgements of others based on clothing alone, when facial features are obscured, from a time limited image.*

The stimuli presented in this study are shown for a maximum of five seconds, without facial features and judgements are made based on the clothing alone. The judgements encompass a wide range of perception variables involving multiple constructs, which are not contingent on each other.

2) *That a minor manipulation of a man's clothing (e.g. the cut of a suit) will influence these rapid judgements.*

The difference between suits is very minor with both suits being the same colour and material, with the same model wearing both. The only difference is the cut and minor tailoring details.

3) *That the earnings of the perceiver will impact the perception of the suits.*

The bespoke suit in this study would retail at around three times the off-the-peg suit price. Those with higher earnings may be more familiar with a tailored suit and their perceptions may differ from participants with lower earnings.

Method

Participants

A total of 308 participants were recruited from social networking sites and contacts in corporate companies, with 240 females and 68 males. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 67 years, with a mean age of 29.42 ($SD = 11.98$) years. A total of 34 participants provided incomplete data, so earnings were recorded for 89% ($N = 274$) of the original sample, with 55% ($n = 152$) earning between £0-25,000, 28% ($n = 76$) earning between £25-50,000 and 17% ($n = 46$) earning over £50,000. Analysis is reported for these 274 participants.

Design

In a repeated measures design all participants viewed and rated the same four images, presented on-line and in a random order. The images varied by suit style (*bespoke* or *off-the-peg*) and posture (*dynamic* or *static*). In two static images the model stood still facing the camera; in two dynamic images the model was pictured walking towards the camera. The set of four images comprised: male-bespoke suit-static posture (Image 1), male-bespoke suit-dynamic posture (Image 2), male-off-the-peg suit-static posture (Image 3), male-off-the-peg suit-dynamic posture (Image 4).

The images appeared on screen for a maximum of five seconds each. All photographs were taken from the same distance so that the model was centred and the same distance from the camera each time. The model's face was pixellated.

Materials/Apparatus

The bespoke male suit was tailor-made for the individual in the image. The off-the-peg suit was purchased from a high street store. The suits were matched on colour (dark blue) and fabric pattern (herringbone). An off-the-peg suit refers to a suit purchased from a shop, which sells ready-made clothing. The suit is provided in a number of pre-determined sizes and is not tailored to any individual. A bespoke suit is specifically designed based on an individual's body shape and particular measurements, which are taken before the suit is produced. In all photos the model wore the same black shoes, dark blue tie and white shirt. The model was white with a tall and slim build with a BMI of 21.

The survey was created in Adobe Dreamweaver CS3 and hosted on an Apache 2 web server. The survey contained an information page, a definitions page explaining each rating, four images, four ratings pages and a debrief page. The ratings were, 'The person in the image is confident', 'The person in the image is successful', 'The person in the image is trustworthy', 'The person in the image earns a high salary' and 'The person in the image has a flexible personality'. The first four ratings used were based on the classification system from Damhorst (1990) and flexibility was taken from Fletcher and Pine (2011). Each statement was accompanied by a scale from 1 'Strongly Disagree' to 7 'Strongly Agree'. Point 4 on the scale represented neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement.

Procedure

A link was posted on social networking sites and circulated by email, which took participants to information about the study and instructions for completion. Confidentiality was assured and the ethical approval protocol number for the study provided.

Participants who agreed to proceed and take part in the experiment read brief definitions of the five ratings to be assigned to each image and were informed that they would see four images for five seconds each and would rate each image on these criteria. When the participants pressed the 'begin' button the first image appeared on the screen. Five seconds was set as the exposure time to allow for variation in the speed with which images would load, ensuring that exposure time was a minimum of three seconds. After viewing each image participants rated the person on five statements relating to the dimensions that had been defined for them earlier. After participants had rated the images they completed a set of demographic questions (age, gender, earnings), were thanked for their time and exited the experiment.

Results

Participants (N = 274) rated four images on five dimensions (confidence, success, trustworthiness, salary, flexibility) on a scale from 1-7. There were no differences in ratings between the static and dynamic images for each suit so the two ratings were collapsed into one single rating. Therefore each rating presented is a mean of the static and dynamic scores. The main hypothesis was that people make global and rapid judgements of the qualities of others based on clothing alone, when facial features are obscured.

We looked at the mean ratings given by participants for the male figure in a bespoke suit and an off-the-peg suit on each of the five dimensions (trustworthiness, confidence, success, salary, and flexibility). The five dimensions were also aggregated into a composite impression score. Perceiver salary was also investigated to explore the role earnings could play on the perception of the different suits.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Table 1 shows the mean ratings for the male figure by suit (bespoke suit and off-the-peg) and earnings (£0-25,000/low, £25-50,000/medium and over £50,000/high). A higher score represents a more favourable rating. To test whether there were any differences in how respondents rated the suits a set of mixed analysis of variances (ANOVA) were conducted, with suit type (bespoke and off-the-peg) as the within subjects factor and earnings (low, medium, and high) as the between subjects factor for each rating.

For the *confidence* rating analysis revealed a significant main effect of suit type, $F(1, 271) = 10.36$, $p < .01$, e2 = .04, power = .89, and a significant main effect of earnings, $F(2, 271) = 6.42$, $p < .01$, e2 = .05, power = .90. The interaction effect was not significant, $F(2, 271) = .42$, $p = .66$, e2 = .00, power = .12. Post Hoc tests using Bonferroni adjusted alpha level tests were carried out showing a significant difference in ratings between low and high earning respondents.

For the *success* rating analysis revealed a main effect bordering on significant for suit type, $F(1, 270) = 3.49$, $p = .06$, e2 = .01, power = .46, and a significant main effect of earnings, $F(2, 270) = 10.58$, $p < .01$, e2 = .07, power = .99. The interaction effect was not significant, $F(2, 270) = .49$, $p = .61$, e2 = .00, power = .13. Post Hoc tests using Bonferroni adjusted alpha level tests were carried out showing a significant difference in ratings between low and medium earning respondents, and low and high earning respondents.

For the *trustworthiness* rating analysis revealed no main effect of suit type, $F(1, 270) = .21$, $p = .65$, e2 = .00, power = .07, but there was a significant main effect of earnings, $F(2, 270) = 4.34$, $p = .01$, e2 = .03, power = .75. The interaction effect was not significant, $F(2, 270) = .1.93$, $p = .15$, e2 = .01, power = .40. Post Hoc tests using Bonferroni adjusted alpha level tests were carried out showing a significant difference in ratings between medium and high earning respondents.

For the *salary* rating analysis revealed a significant main effect of suit type, $F(1, 270) = 14.00$, $p < .01$, e2 = .05, power = .96, and a significant main effect of earnings, $F(2, 271) = 8.40$, $p < .01$, e2 = .06, power = .96. The interaction effect was bordering on significant, $F(2, 270) = .2.85$, $p = .06$, e2 = .02, power = .56. Post Hoc tests using Bonferroni adjusted alpha level tests were carried out showing a significant difference in ratings between medium and high earning respondents.

For the *flexibility* rating analysis revealed a main effect bordering on significant for suit type, $F(1, 271) = 3.00$, $p = .09$, e2 = .01, power = .41, but no main effect of earnings, $F(2, 271) = .76$, $p = .47$, e2 = .00, power = .18. The interaction effect was also not significant, $F(2, 271) = .59$, $p = .55$, e2 = .00, power = .15.

For the *composite* rating analysis revealed a significant main effect of suit type, $F(1, 272) = 11.49$, $p < .01$, e2 = .04, power = .92, and a significant main effect of earnings, $F(2, 272) = 6.61$, $p < .01$, e2 = .05, power = .91. The interaction effect was not significant, $F(2, 272) = .11$, $p = .90$, e2 = .00, power = .07. Post Hoc tests using Bonferroni adjusted alpha level tests were carried out showing a significant difference in ratings between low and high earning respondents, and medium and high earning respondents.

In summary, the results showed a main effect of suit type for the confidence, salary and composite ratings, with a borderline effect for the success and flexible personality ratings. All effects of suit type were due to the bespoke suit being rated more favourably than the off-the-peg suit.

A main effect of respondent earnings was also found for the confidence, success, trustworthiness, salary and composite ratings. All effects (apart from trustworthiness) were due to high earning individuals giving less favourable ratings of both suits.

Discussion

This study set out to investigate whether minor changes in attire would affect first impressions when facial features are absent and with limited exposure time. The tendency to make rapid judgements based on clothing alone was demonstrated by significantly different ratings being given to the same model in closely related styles of dress. In a controlled experiment we explored whether a minor manipulation of the man's clothing (the cut of a suit) would influence judgements and found that the bespoke suit consistently produced more positive impressions than a similar off-the-peg suit.

The attributes used as measures in this study are those with social and occupational significance: confidence, success, salary, flexibility and trustworthiness. The ratings for the man were higher on all ratings when he was wearing the bespoke suit, reaching statistical significance for the first four dimensions and for an overall composite rating, but not for trustworthiness.

In addition to suit type we also investigated how participants at different levels of earnings differed in their judgements. Respondents were divided into low, medium and high earners. It was found that earnings had a consistent effect on ratings, so that the higher the participant's earnings the lower the ratings, for both suits. An effect of earnings was found for the confidence, success, salary and composite ratings, suggesting that higher perceiver job status negatively affected overall perception for both suit types.

Most previous research has manipulated experimentally the overall style of clothing, for example comparing formal clothing with casual wear. The purpose of the current experiment was to address the methodological limitations of previous studies. We compared a man in two dark blue suits of herringbone cloth, where one was bespoke and the other an off-the-peg suit. Therefore

this change was very subtle; both suits were formal, the same colour, and the same fabric. Perceivers could not have been influenced by facial features and the short exposure time was carefully controlled, yet nonetheless the suit type had a significantly different impact upon perceivers. This effect is especially strong when it is considered that the ratings are of a heterogeneous nature, exploring very different perceptual variables.

It is now well documented that people can form snap judgements, with an above chance level of accuracy, and can do so from a single static picture (Olivola and Todorov, 2010a). These inferences are based on visual cues such as facial features, facial expressions, and posture, but clothing is also known to play a part (Naumann *et al.*, 2009). A change in clothing style has been found to significantly affect inferences about the personality of that individual (Bell, 1991; Paek, 1986). In particular people pay attention to details such as the type of suit and the fit and colour of the garment being worn (Johnson *et al.*, 2002), although to our knowledge this study is the first to do so without facial information and with limited exposure time.

The earnings levels of the perceivers were considered when comparing the effects since it has been suggested that members of certain social groups or communities are more susceptible to the communication of clothing than others (McCracken and Roth, 1989), and that bespoke suit customers are more likely to have higher earnings (Oliver *et al.*, 1993). Indeed, the results revealed that both suits were rated as less favourable by higher earning individuals as they may have been more familiar with this attire, therefore it had less impact on their perceptions.

Previous studies have shown that clothing can be a vehicle by which personal attributes are communicated about a person (e.g. Damhorst, 1990) and can transfer cultural meaning from the world to the individual via product design and marketing (McCracken, 1988). Our findings show

the positive impression that a bespoke suit creates, perhaps arising from the beliefs that individuals have regarding clothing of this type. For example, Kwon (1994) showed that men believe that well-chosen clothing can communicate that they are intelligent, competent, knowledgeable, honest and reliable. It appears that the finer details of the bespoke suit communicated other positive attributes, such as confidence and success, more so than the off-the-peg suit, even with brief exposure time. This finding has implications for men in western society where appearance can communicate personal attributes and first impressions have considerable personal and occupational consequences.

Interest in fashion has long been seen as a female domain, although men are becoming increasingly fashion and appearance conscious. The burgeoning of fashion phenomena such as grooming, shaving and tanning products for men bear witness to this growth market. Men also use clothing to improve their appearance or create and maintain their identity, and it is still an accepted sartorial rule that 'every man should own at least one suit or equivalent garment according to his heritage'[1]. In their 2004 study Frith and Gleeson revealed that males experience pressure for self-management and spend time planning outfits to emphasise qualities that fit into 'cultural ideals of masculinity', such as height and athleticism. Yet men's scope for variety is less than women's. Professional men, in particular, have fewer clothing options than women and the suit forms the accepted dress code in many professional work settings. On the evidence of this study it appears men may be justified in such status-seeking purchases, for apparel that is well-fitted and well-tailored, it seems, can positively enhance the image they communicate to others. Given the power of prescribed dress codes to de-individualise (Schiermer, 2010),

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[1] Quote from fashion blog Art of Manliness http://artofmanliness.com/2010/05/13/how-to-build-your-wardrobe-2/

personal tailoring may offer the male the means to re-assert his self-identity within narrowly-prescribed parameters. This is also pertinent to the internalising process of wearing individualised apparel and future research should aim to deepen our understanding of the increased confidence, comfort or sociability afforded to the male when wearing a suit that is tailored to his body shape. For, as well as expressing attributes, style of dress may also play a role in creating positive attributes and many fashion theorists draw attention to not just the reception but also the production of identity via clothing (Venkatesh, Annamma, Sherry, and Deschenes, 2010). Recent research from the newly emerging field of enclothed cognition would endorse this assertion (Adam and Gaminsky, In Press).

Research into embodied cognition suggests that future studies need to explore how male clothing interacts with body posture to produce changes in cognition as well as in the perceptions of others. Adopting a powerful pose has been linked to advantageous thought, behaviour and physiological responses (Carney, Cuddy, and Yap, 2010; Huang, Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Guillory, 2011). This raises the question of whether a weak body posture undermines the positive impression created by a well-fitted garment or whether a powerful pose enhances the effect. With female attire there is more pressure to balance attractiveness and professionalism. Our current work is showing how minor changes in the provocativeness of female work attire creates negative perceptions, especially of a female in a senior position (Howlett, Pine, Cahill, Orakçıoğlu and Fletcher, under review). This also raises the question of whether manipulating the job status of male models would affect the perceptions created by minor changes in clothing.

Overall, we have shown that a man wearing a bespoke rather than an off-the-peg suit creates a more favourable impression, although this may be mediated by the salary level of the perceiver. This study is the first to empirically investigate these judgements using time–limited images with

minor clothing manipulations on a model devoid of any facial features or expressions, enabling us to conclude with confidence that the impressions arose only from the apparel and were not confounded by the physical attractiveness of the model. We conclude that even apparently minor modifications to clothing style can have a major impact on the information conveyed to perceivers. People are judged on their overall head-to-toe appearance within seconds, and the fundamental role that choice of apparel plays in creating a positive first impression cannot be underestimated.

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