Dress to Impress: The Influence of the Enclothed Cognition Effect on Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy

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According to Adams and Galinsky's (2012) enclothed cognition effect, clothing can have a strong influence on an individual's performance. Particular articles of clothing, such as a doctor's coat or army uniforms, may connote specific traits such as prestige and power. Yet, even generic forms of attire, such as casual or professional clothing, may shape people's self-perceptions. The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of clothing on two essential traits: self-esteem and self-efficacy. It was hypothesized that compared to participants in casual attire, those dressed professionally would display higher levels of (A) self-esteem, (B) self-efficacy, and (C) be more likely to demonstrate intent to apply for a higher level position. Participants (N=120) were randomly assigned to wear their own clothing (control), casual, or professional attire, while completing the five positively phrased items of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the General Self-Efficacy Scale, and a question regarding the likelihood of applying for a new position which would require increased responsibility and present the potential of greater rewards. Statistical analyses revealed that students in casual clothing scored significantly lower ($p<.001$) than those in both other conditions on all variables. In addition, participants dressed professionally exhibited significantly higher self-perception than the control and casual groups ($p<.001$). This study is the first to reveal the impact of attire on reported self-perception in adolescents. The results of this study demonstrate the extent to which clothing can impact self-perception, and indicate the potentially expansive scope of influence the enclothed cognition effect may have.

Awards Won:

Third Award of $1,000

American Statistical Association: Certificate of Honorable Mention