

PERCEPTION OF MEN'S PERSONAL QUALITIES AND PROSPECT OF EMPLOYMENT AS A FUNCTION OF FACIAL HAIR^{1,2}

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Summary.—The present study investigated the contribution of men's facial hair to impression formation. Participants evaluated photographs of one of four versions of a man—clean shaven, mustached, goateed, or bearded—on a 7-point scale. In Study 1, participants were 106 Brazilian undergraduates (68 men and 38 women). Beardedness was associated with older age, greater responsibility, and leftist political ideas. In Study 2, respondents were 50 Brazilian personnel managers (28 men and 22 women) who made hiring decisions at different companies in the city of São Paulo. Personnel managers clearly preferred clean shaven over bearded, mustached, or goateed men as prospective employees. In a hiring situation for a conservative occupation, a man who signals disposition to conform to rules may be preferred by personnel managers over another who signals nonconformity.

Physical appearance is a powerful potential source of information during initial acquaintance. Physical persona can affect people's impressions about another's attractiveness, personality, social status, and even competence, intelligence, and moral character (Knapp & Hall, 1992; Satrapa, Melhado, Coelho, Otta, Taubemblatt, & Siqueira, 1992). Despite the warning, "Don't judge a book by its cover," people "tend to judge books by their nonverbal covers" (Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1996). Stereotyping others is considered an inevitable human process that functions as a shortcut to evaluate others before more information is available (Andersen, 1999). First impressions may change as more information is gained during subsequent contact. But the first impressions may serve as a template, guiding the interpretation of subsequent information (Burgoon, *et al.*, 1996). Changing a negative first impression may be difficult, despite the presence of many obvious counterexamples (Kenny, Horner, Kashy, & Chu, 1992).

Facial hair is a signal of age. Increased testosterone during puberty produces sexual maturation in the male face, growth of facial hair, and broaden-

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ing of the chin. Facial hair may have evolved as a signal of threat and dominance and an announcement of a male's potential for reproductive success (Muscarella & Cunningham, 1996). Beards could have evolved through sexual selection, as a result of female choice (Darwin, 1901), or as a result of direct competition among males (Guthrie, 1970, 1976). Men wearing facial hair were seen as older than when they were clean shaven (Muscarella & Cunningham, 1996).

Freedman (1969) argued that status and sexual magnetism are associated with beards, asserting universal meaning to it. Published in a magazine article, his ideas are heuristic, but given the anecdotal nature of his study, the database is fragile. Asked to describe bearded and clean shaven men, female subjects described photographs of bearded men as more masculine, mature, and sophisticated, while male subjects described them as more independent and extroverted. Freedman also presented one card from the Thematic Apperception Test to 40 undergraduates. The control group saw the original card picturing an elderly grave-looking man with a mustache next to a young, serious looking, clean shaven man. Male undergraduates typically told stories of a person of authority interacting with a humble youth—"Members of different generations. The older man is confident. The younger is frustrated by the confidence of the older man" (p. 38). The experimental group saw the same card but a beard was drawn on the younger man. The stories told by male undergraduates were radically different. The beard made the younger man equal or dominant—"Two professors discussing some academic matter of mutual concern" (p. 38).

Pellegrini (1973) photographed men with beards and mustaches, and then photographed them shaven to goatees and again completely shaven. Judges evaluated the photographs in terms of a series of personality traits. Analysis indicated that facial hair changed the image of the man. Specially, the more facial hair, the higher the ratings on masculinity, maturity, self-confidence, dominance, courage, liberalism, nonconformity, industriousness, and good looks.

Differently from Freedman (1969) and Pellegrini (1973), Wogalter and Hosie (1991) found that clean shaven faces were regarded more favorably than bearded faces. They appeared more attractive and more sociable. Investigating the perceptions of men's facial hair in political spot advertisements, LaLumia (1987) found that beards did not enhance the image of political candidates. Feinman and Gill (1977) found that nonbearded men were preferred to bearded ones by female undergraduates. In fact, 83% of these students reported their preference was for either a clean shaven face or for a mustache without a beard.

Conflicting results concerning the influence of facial hair on perceptions of attractiveness may be due to age differences in participants. Men with

beards tend to be viewed as older and more mature (Muscarella & Cunningham, 1996). It may be that female college students of traditional age, i.e., 18–22 years, may view bearded men as relatively unattractive because the men are seen as too old, whereas older participants may see these men as more attractive (anonymous reviewer, personal communication). Conflicting results may also be related to changes over time in the perception of facial hair. According to Corson (1980), during particular periods in history facial hair was a symbol of respectability, while at other times it could signify disregard of fashion or nonconformity. Differently from the 1960s and early 1970s, from the late 1970s onwards facial hair might have changed in significance. We would expect further changes in attitudes toward beards with the recent problems concerning terrorists with Islamic fundamentalists and the Taliban. As a matter of fact, a dozen or more nationally syndicated cartoons appeared making fun of bearded Islamic terrorists. Another cartoon lampooned Al Gore's bad timing of growing a beard just prior to September 11th (since shaved off), comparing him to terrorists (anonymous reviewer, personal communication).

Being able to grow a beard is associated with age and general masculine maturity, but beyond this one treads directly into culturally bound attitudes. The amount of desirable facial hair may vary greatly from culture to culture as the Taliban order all men to wear beards. As decreed by the Koran, the beard functions as part of the uniform for Taliban soldiers. According to the Koran, Allah chooses a prophet who will select among the dead those who can go to heaven. The selection criteria for soldiers are wounds and wearing a beard. During the war that followed September 11th, Afghan men who shaved their faces were showing their desire to stop fighting. Clean shaven men were not soldiers anymore and, therefore, did not have to surrender themselves.

In North America facial hair is considered unprofessional in the business world (Burgoon & Saine, 1978; Andersen, 1999). Reed and Blunk (1990) investigated the perceptions of personnel managers when interviewing a prospective employee. Men ($n=150$) and women ($n=138$) in management positions who made hiring decisions at 177 companies in four major cities in Texas used semantic differential scales to evaluate sketches of male job applicants who varied on three facial dimensions—clean shaven, mustached, and bearded. The findings did not support Burgoon and Saine's (1978) or Andersen's hypothesis (1999). Facial hair was significantly and positively correlated with ratings of social/physical attractiveness, personality, competence, and composure suggesting that a beard can also have survival value in modern times in the sense of contributing to successful employment.

Facial hair may be a cohesive force, an identity factor used to promote group formation. One may note a group of men in North America united by

the unusual beards they wear. They use WEB (www.beards.org) to display their photographs, their meetings, and to invite new participants.

In the present study we examined the influence of four facial hair dimensions—clean shaven, mustached, goateed, and bearded—on the perception of men by Brazilian undergraduates and employers. While it would be interesting to use unusual beards such as those found on the above website, we chose more conventional ones at our first approach to the issue. We examined the influence of facial hair on the perception of personal qualities by undergraduates (Study 1) and by personnel managers who made hiring decisions (Study 2). We expected that, independently of participants' sex, facial hair would be associated with greater attributions of age, and of masculine physical and personality traits, e.g., aggressiveness. We also expected that feminine undergraduates should view bearded men as relatively unattractive. Finally, supposing that the acceptability of beardedness would be greater in a liberal context than in a conservative one, we hypothesized that personnel managers would evaluate a bearded man less favorably than undergraduates.

METHOD

Subjects

Study 1.—Respondents were 106 undergraduates of the University of São Paulo (68 men and 38 women) who ranged in age from 17 to 31 years, with an average age of 25.2 ± 6.3 . They volunteered to participate individually in what was described as a study of person perception.

Study 2.—Respondents were 50 personnel managers (28 men and 22 women), who ranged from 30 to 62 years, with average age 35.1 ± 8.7 , and made hiring decisions at four different companies in the city of São Paulo, a metropolis located in the southeast of Brazil. The firms were medium-size private businesses.

Stimulus Material

Models were six Caucasian men with similar facial features in their late twenties and unacquainted with the respondents. They were photographed, directly facing the camera, from the upper trunk to the top of the head, against a neutral background. Four versions were prepared of each model with the software Photoshop (Version 6.0)—clean shaven, mustached, goateed, and bearded.

Procedure

Study 1.—Respondents were randomly assigned to view only one photograph of a man in one facial appearance. They were given an answer sheet and were asked to rate the man pictured on 13 different dimensions: (1) Introverted–Extroverted, (2) Unintelligent–Intelligent, (3) Unrefined–Refined,

(4) Irresponsible–Responsible, (5) Leftist–Rightist, (6) Unattractive–Attractive, (7) Unfriendly–Friendly, (8) Unaggressive–Aggressive, (9) Unkind–Kind, (10) Unpleasant–Pleasant, (11) Ugly–Handsome, (12) Negligent Father–Good Father, (13) Poor–Wealthy. All adjectives were presented on scales with anchors of 1 and 7, assigned to bipolar opposites. Finally, they were asked to estimate models' age (in years). Respondents were tested individually, and the study was introduced as one of first impressions, but they were not told that facial hair was being manipulated.

Study 2.—Respondents viewed four photographs of men with different facial appearances: clean shaven, mustached, goateed, and bearded. Their task was to choose one of them as employee, colleague, boss, best administrator, most inventive, and most organized.

RESULTS

Study 1

The ratings for each of the 13 adjective pairs by undergraduates in Study 1 were analyzed using a two-way multivariate analysis of variance, the two between-subject factors being stimulus person's facial appearance and sex of respondent. A significant main effect for facial appearance emerged from the multivariate analysis of variance (Wilks lambda = 0.57; $F_{13,94} = 1.49$, $p < .05$). The main effect for sex of respondent (Wilks lambda = 0.87; $F_{13,94} = 1.05$, $p > .05$) was not significant nor was the interaction facial appearance \times sex of respondent (Wilks lambda = 0.74; $F_{39,275} = 0.77$, $p > .05$).

In the follow-up univariate analyses facial hair was significantly associated with impressions of age ($F_{3,108} = 3.04$, $p < .05$), political orientation ($F_{3,106} = 4.01$, $p < .01$), and responsibility ($F_{3,106} = 2.68$, $p < .05$). The means and standard errors are in Table 1.

TABLE 1
MEANS AND STANDARD ERRORS FOR DEPENDENT MEASURES AS A FUNCTION OF FACIAL HAIR

Measure	Bearded		Moustached		Goateed		Clean Shaven	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Estimated Age	30.83	1.15	30.57	1.18	27.97	.91	27.21	.83
Leftist (1)–Rightist (7)	2.55	.23	2.72	.24	2.76	.24	3.57	.21
Irresponsible (1)–Responsible (7)	3.44	.12	3.53	.18	2.89	.17	3.07	.15

Tukey *post hoc* comparisons indicated that men with beards and mustaches looked older than those clean shaven ($p < .05$). Goateed men were not perceived as significantly different in age from men with mustaches or beards. Beardedness was associated with left wing political ideas. Bearded men were considered more leftist than clean shaven ($p < .05$), mustached

($p < .05$), or goateed ($p < .05$). In addition, bearded ($p < .05$) and mustached ($p < .05$) men were rated as more responsible than goateed men.

Study 2

In Study 2 personnel managers significantly preferred clean shaven men (60%) over bearded (15%), mustached (15%), or goateed (10%) in the role of boss. A chi squared test indicated that this distribution was significant [$\chi^2(N=19)=20.56, p < .01$]. As prospective employees, both bearded (40%) and mustached (36%) men were acceptable and preferred over goateed (6%) and bearded men (18%) [$\chi^2(N=50)=15.12, p < .01$]. Finally, clean shaven (38%) and goateed (35%) were considered more creative than mustached (8%) or bearded (6%) men (16%) [$\chi^2(N=50)=14.16, p < .01$].

DISCUSSION

Consistent with the results of previous investigations (e.g., Freedman, 1969; Wogalter & Hosie, 1991; Muscarella & Cunningham, 1996), and with the conclusion that facial hair serves as a biological marker of physical maturation, we found that beardedness increased perceptions of age. The presence of a beard increased the perceived age of a man in his late twenties by 3.6 years, the same value reported by Muscarella and Cunningham (1996). In our study no difference in perceived age was found between mustached and bearded faces. A halo effect could explain the association of some specific traits to older people, such as sense of responsibility.

Results of the present investigation also indicated that beardedness was associated with left-wing political ideas. It may be useful to speculate briefly on this result. It is notable that icons of left-wing ideas wore or now wear beards, e.g., Karl Marx, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Lula.³ While a beard might be a display chosen by these political leaders to strengthen their messages, their personal qualities may also become associated with beardedness. Masculinity, dominance, aggressiveness, strength, self-confidence, and nonconformity were associated with beardedness (Roll & Verinis, 1971; Kenny & Fletcher, 1973; Pellegrini, 1973; Pancer & Meindl, 1978; Wood, 1986; Addison, 1989; Reed & Blunk, 1990). Hellströmm and Tekle (1994) reported that hairless faces were associated with members of conservative or 'establishment' occupations—colonel, diplomat, lawyer, or managing director—and bearded faces with 'liberal' occupations—artist, professor, scientist, and psychologist. From the perspective of evolutionary psychology, Guthrie (1970) suggested that facial hair might have evolved as a signal of threat and dominance because it increased the volume of the lower face, and Freedman (1969) hypothesized that beardedness was adaptive, giving men more status

³Lula, former president of the Worker Party, a left-wing political organization in Brazil, is the elected president of Brazil from 2002 to 2007.

in the eyes of other men. Some psychoanalytic writers (Berg, 1936; Barahal, 1940) also have proposed that there is a strong association between hair and potency.

In the present study facial hair did not make men more attractive in the eyes of women, contradicting Freedman's hypothesis (1969) of sexual magnetism of the beard. According to Guthrie (1970), beards might have evolved as a threat signal through intrasexual selection—competition between males for dominance and resources—and not through intersexual (epigamic) selection—preference by females. In evolutionary history women might have chosen to mate with mature dominant men despite and not because of their beards, that could be excessively threatening. Studying the relation of facial-metrics to masculine attractiveness, Cunningham, Barbee, and Pike (1990) found that male facial attractiveness was associated with the neotenous features of wide eyes and small nose and the mature features of a long and wide chin, prominent cheekbones, and thick eyebrows, and the expressive feature of a wide smile. Therefore, both neotenic and mature/dominant facial features were associated with enhanced male attractiveness. The most attractive faces were intermediate, neither extremely mature nor extremely baby-faced. We agree with the multiple motive hypothesis of female attraction proposed by Cunningham, *et al.* (1990) according to which women seek men who appear to offer the best chance to be affectionate, high-status, androgynous mates. Seeking these qualities they prefer males who combine mature with childish and expressive features.

Study 2 showed that personnel managers clearly preferred clean shaven and mustached men over goateed and bearded men as prospective employees. In a real life situation obviously other behavioral cues are taken into account besides facial hair, but the influence of a cue that can negatively affect a first impression should not be disregarded. Apparently a bearded (goateed) face is negatively evaluated in the Brazilian business world, probably given the association of beardedness with left-wing ideas. In a hiring situation for a conservative occupation, a man who signals disposition to conform to rules may be preferred by personnel managers over another who signals nonconformity.

It is interesting to note that in Study 2 personnel managers also preferred clean shaven men in the role of boss over men with facial hair. Mustached men who were acceptable as employees were not acceptable as bosses. Personnel managers also attributed greater creativity to clean shaven men. This was a quality also attributed to goateed men. In this case, creativity might be a characteristic associated with nonconformity.

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