How Does an Instructor's Physical Attractiveness Impact a Student's Perceptions of the Instructor's Teaching Abilities?

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Research Question

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- How Does an Instructor's Physical Attractiveness Impact a Student's Perceptions of the Instructor's Teaching Abilities?
    - How do students measure their instructor's physical attractiveness?
    - To what extent does an instructor's physical attractiveness influence a student's perception of the instructor's competency and intelligence?
    - How does this perception affect the student's academic performance or the instructor's work performance?
    - How does the age and gender of an instructor impact their measure of physical attractiveness, from the perspective of students?

Objectives:

The goal of this research report is to investigate how students' opinions of an instructor impact their learning experience. This may include how their perception of an instructor impacts how engaged they feel in class? How does the student's own gender, age and attractiveness impact their perception of their instructor's attractiveness? How does it impact their willingness to participate or their motivation to work for that class? Is there a correlation between how a student perceives their level of learning and how well they actually perform? Should universities consider student evaluations of instructor's abilities when choosing to promote or fire faculty? This may be an especially interesting topic with University of Toronto students studying this winter semester since they will have experienced the instructional style of their instructors both online and in-person.

Literature Review

Introduction

Many educators believe that behind every great student is a great instructor. Instead, pedagogical research suggests that behind every successful student is a physically attractive instructor. In a given domain, more attractive individuals receive better outcomes relative to average or less attractive individuals, revealing a 'beauty premium'. The implications of this phenomenon are crucial to educational institutions as implicit biases in teaching evaluations damage the education quality of educational institutions and the career development of instructors. The mechanisms for this phenomenon are highly debated. Furthermore, the literature is unsettled on the potential of a gender bias coupled with the beauty premium. This literature review examines recent investigations of the 'beauty premium' phenomenon among student evaluations of teaching (SETs) in post-secondary academic institutions.

Individual differences and Enhanced Non-Cognitive Skills

Many researchers posit that the beauty premium is justly earned because physically attractive individuals have inherent differences that enhance their competency and productivity. Kanazawa and Still (2017) identify individual differences as the ultimate cause of more satisfying careers and higher wages for physically attractive individuals across all occupations, including academia. Their research in the economics of beauty indicates that attractive employees consistently have a positive array of the Big Five personality factors. Attractive employees in all occupations are considered to be open, conscientious, extraverted, and agreeable, but not neurotic (Kanazawa & Still, 2017). Kanazawa and Still (2017) explain that

this is most likely because attractive individuals tend to have better social experiences during development. Carpenter et al. (2020) reveal that students perceive that they learn more when conscientious instructors prepare organized lectures. Furthermore, students feel more interested in the material presented by extraverted, enthusiastic instructors (Carpenter et al, 2020). Overall, physically attractive instructors appear to rightfully earn a beauty premium for their enhanced non-cognitive skills.

Beauty Bias

The 'beauty premium' is often considered to be a byproduct of an implicit student bias favoring physically attractive instructors. A strong indicator of bias among SETs is the dichotomy in evaluations for the same instructor. Babin et al. (2020) analyze the SETs of a sample of instructors that teach face-to-face and online classes, to control for the instructor. They deduce that female instructors receive substantially higher effectiveness ratings in face-to-face classes than online classes (Babin et al., 2020). Boehmer and Wood (2017) draw similar conclusions from a comparison of student evaluations with faculty evaluations of a sample of instructors. They discover that students have better opinions of the abilities of "hot" instructors than faculty (2017). These studies indicate that the beauty premium is only rewarded where the beauty bias can emerge, in face-to-face classes with students.

Halo Effect and Student Confidence

The halo effect, as coined by Thorndike, is the tendency to inflate perceptions of the qualities and skills a physically attractive individual possesses. This is evident in the visual pedagogy study of Martikainen (2019). Students categorize physically attractive instructors with

expressive nonverbal communication as a kind, gentle, caring and empathetic teacher (Martikainen, 2019). This may be considered as the students' recognition of the Big Five personality factors in instructor appearances, and their appreciation for instructors with these qualities (Carpenter et al., 2020; Kanazawa & Still, 2017). However, student ratings of instructors' abilities are rooted in student satisfaction, which is cultivated by visually engaging instructors (Tran & Do, 2020). Alternatively, Tan et al. (2019) deduce that a student's degree of confidence is the predominant factor mediating the physical attractiveness of an instructor and their performance evaluation. Moreover, Hernàndez-Julià̀n and Peters (2017) found that a student's confidence is influenced by their social circle. They observed students gain confidence in classes where they were surrounded by physically attractive peers and instructors (Hernàndez-Julià̀n & Peters, 2017).

It is irrefutable that the physical attractiveness of instructors produces a positive psychological impact on a student's perceptions of their character. These individual components can interact to justify that a seemingly approachable and visually engaging instructor will likely increase the willingness of a student to participate in class discussions. Consequently, this boosts the student's confidence in class and their ratings of the instructor's skills. Therefore, the beauty premium may accurately reflect the indirect positive influence of physically attractive instructors on student psychology and learning.

Gender bias

The presence of a gender bias within the beauty bias is debated. While Babin et al. (2020) deduce that only female instructors receive the 'beauty premium', Tran and Do (2020) conclude that although attractiveness is positively correlated with ratings of teaching competency, gender

has no statistical significance on who receives the beauty premium. Contrarily, Hernàndez-Julià and Peters (2017) found that the boost in student confidence induced by physically attractive peers and instructors is strongest for female students with young male instructors. Moreover, Rosen (2017) analyzed web-based student reviews on RateMyProfessors.com and found that approximately 70% of 'hot' professors receive perfect clarity, helpfulness and overall quality scores. Among this proportion, females receive on average 0.04-0.05 points, on a five-point scale, less than males (Rosen, 2017). Moreover, Murray et al. (2020) found that the physical attractiveness of instructors increases teaching ability ratings by 0.41 points on a five-point scale. However, they discovered that attractive male faculty enjoy an extra 0.11 points (Murray et al., 2020).

Babin et al. (2020) note that in most domains, women are more frequently judged by their appearance than men. This would suggest that physically attractive female instructors would receive a beauty premium more frequently than males, as shown by Babin et al. (2020). However, the literature is highly inconsistent with the orientation and the presence of a gender bias within the beauty premium.

Conclusion

Student evaluations of instructors' teaching abilities are crucial for educational institutions to make meaningful modifications to their faculty and instructional techniques. Extensive literature on the 'beauty premium' among academics has established an unrefuted bias favoring physically attractive instructors (Babin et al., 2020; Boehmer & Wood: 2017; Rosen, 2017). However, the literature is divided on whether it is justly earned or is a byproduct of implicit student biases. Furthermore, there is uncertainty surrounding the implications of the

beauty premium and whether it reflects a student's learning, confidence or satisfaction in class. There is a substantial lack of research on the age of an instructor as a potentially intervening variable between the beauty of instructors and their teaching abilities. Moreover, subsequent research should investigate the potential gap between a student's perceptions of their learning and their academic performance. This may identify the mechanism of the beauty premium which will shed light on its impacts on the quality of education for future generations of students.

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