

### **Attraction: The Halo Effect**

Attraction operates by making one positive characteristic of a person affect the public's overall perception of them. Sociologists describe this as the Halo Effect. Because of this halo effect, people automatically associate traits of kindness, trust, and intelligence with people who are attractive. We naturally try to please people we like and find attractive. If your audience likes you, they will forgive you for your "wrongs" and remember your "rights." In fact, studies show that people who are physically attractive are better able to persuade others. They are also perceived as friendlier and more talented, and they usually have higher incomes. "Attractive" means more than just looking beautiful or handsome. It also encompasses having the ability to attract and draw people to you.

The effect of attractiveness transcends all situations. For example, the judicial system, which is supposed to be based upon evidence, has documented cases where attractiveness made a dramatic difference. In one Pennsylvania study, researchers rated the attractiveness of 74 male defendants at the start of their criminal trials. Later, the researchers reviewed the court records for the decisions in these cases and found that the handsome men had received significantly lighter sentences. In fact, those researchers found that the attractive defendants were twice as likely to avoid jail time as unattractive defendants. In the same study, a defendant who was better-looking than his victim was assessed an average fine of \$5,623; but when the victim was the more attractive of the two, the average compensation was twice that much. What's more, both female and male jurors showed the same bias.

The same Halo Effect also holds true for political elections. In 1974, a Canadian Federal election board found attractive candidates received more than two and a half times as many votes as unattractive candidates. When voters were surveyed about their bias, 73% denied, in the strongest possible terms, that they were influenced by attractiveness. Another 14% would only allow for the possibility.

Consider these everyday examples of one's appearance influencing their circumstances: Have you ever noticed that height often seems to have some relation to one's position? It often seems that the taller people get the great jobs and have higher salaries.

Did you ever notice as a child that there were some children who seemed to be able to get away with anything? There has been some research showing that attractive children who misbehave are considered "less naughty" by adults than less attractive children. In elementary school, teachers often presumed the more attractive children were even more intelligent than the less attractive children.

When we come in contact with someone of the opposite sex, the attractiveness concept is magnified. Attractive females can persuade men more easily than unattractive ones, and attractive males can persuade females more easily than unattractive males can. We see obvious examples of this all around us. At conventions and trade shows, large corporations fill their space with sexy and attractive females. In one study, men who saw a new car ad that included a seductive female model rated the car as faster, more

appealing, more expensive-looking, and better designed than did men who viewed the same ad without the model. Additionally, female students who are perceived to be more attractive by their professors often receive substantially higher grades than unattractive females. It is not uncommon for the store manager to assign the attractive sales rep to the young bachelor who walks in the door. Most store managers (although they won't admit it) hire attractive salespeople to attract more customers.

Research has shown that looks matter outside of advertising as well. In various studies, attractive men and women, when compared to those who were considered to be less attractive, were judged to be happier, smarter, friendlier, and more likable. They were also considered likely to have better jobs, be better marital partners, or to get more dates. The Halo Effect causes us to see such people only in a positive way, which gives them persuasive power. Because of the way we view them, we want to be like them and we hope for them to like us in return.

The attractiveness of our clothes can also evoke the Law of Connectivity. Researchers Freed, Chandler, Mouton, and Blake conducted a now-famous experiment on how easy it would be to encourage people to ignore a "Don't Walk" sign at a city intersection. When a well-dressed individual ignored the sign and walked into the street, 14% of the people who had been waiting for the light to change followed him across. When the same person repeated the experiment the next day, now dressed in street clothes, only 4% of the people followed him across. A similar effect has been found in hiring situations. In one study, the good grooming of applicants in a simulated employment interview accounted for more favorable hiring decisions than did their job qualifications. This happened even though the interviewers claimed that appearance only played a minor role in their choices. I know that when I travel how I am dressed is directly related to how I am treated and to how often I am upgraded. I can persuade the airline attendant to give me better seats, a better flight, or the help I need much better and faster when I am in a suit than when I am wearing casual attire. When I have on jeans and a T-shirt, I am viewed as less attractive and, as a result, get less cooperation.

Not only can we focus on our other abilities to make us appear more attractive, but we can also increase our physical attractiveness in many different ways. Attractiveness lies in the simple things that many people overlook, like being in shape and watching your weight, picking nice clothes to wear, paying attention to your accessories (i.e. jewelry, glasses, earrings, etc.), and having well-groomed hair. Keep track of hair and clothing styles. Styles can change dramatically, and if we ignore fashion, our persuasive ability may be put in jeopardy. When in doubt, look to national newscasters as conservative role models in style.