Female Student's Clothing Styles and their Effect on Perceived Intelligence by College Professors

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Abstract

This study was conducted to look at the contemporary effects of students' clothing styles on college professors' perceptions about the students' intelligence, attractiveness, and sociability. The effects of three dress conditions, formal attire, provocative attire, and casual attire, were studied on professors on a southeastern university. The hypothesis stated that a student wearing formal attire would receive the highest overall rating and the highest rating in intelligence. The casual attire condition would receive the lowest rating in intelligence and overall rating. The rating of the provocative clothing condition is predicted to change based on the sex of the rater. One of the most important factors in this study is that this research was conducted in university setting, which is something that previous research on this topic lacked. University professors (N=43) answered an online survey where they were exposed to one of the three dress conditions. The attractiveness of the student was controlled by using the same model for all three dress conditions and was photographed in the same pose. Results indicated that the sex of the professors did not have a significant effect on the grade assigned and overall rating of the student. There were significant differences between the conditions of the red dress and no photo in five attributes. The students wearing the red dress received the lowest score in self-confidence, cheerfulness, individualism and overall class grade. Furthermore, the findings of this research extend previous research on the topic of clothing styles and perception by investigating it at the university level.

Keywords: clothing, red, students, university, grading

Female Students' Clothing Styles and their Effect on Perceived Intelligence by College Professors

First impressions are crucial opinions created about people based on limited information. When a person meets someone new they use every detail possible to learn what that person is like. An important aspect that people use to form first impressions is the types of clothes one wears. Clothing styles tend to change frequently with the years, and each style has its own meaning attached to it. People use clothing to show their unique personalities and characteristics, but in some cases this could work against them. Previous research has shown that formal attire is perceived to be associated with intelligence when compared to more casual clothing styles. This study was conducted to investigate the effect that female students' clothing styles has on college professors' perceptions about intelligence, attractiveness, and sociability.

The major themes mentioned in this study are the "self fulfilling prophecy", the influence of attractiveness, and clothing's effect on perception of intelligence. The "self-fulfilling prophecy" is explained as a meaning that one gives to a situation or person. Based on this meaning that ascribed to people or events, expectations are created and behavior changes accordingly (Wilkins, 1976). For example, the researchers Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), investigated the "self- fulfilling prophecy" in an elementary school setting. They gave elementary students an IQ test before the experiment was conducted, and then they selected twenty percent of the students at random and told their teachers that based on the test that group of students was going to show intellectual growth. A year later, the researchers gave all of the students the same IQ test. The results indicated that the teacher's expectations had an effect on students' performance on the test. The group of students that was supposed to show intellectual

growth did actually show improvement. The researchers believe that these results were found because the teachers were probably more encouraging to the selected group of students because they expected them to show improvement. Their expectations were the self- fulfilling prophecy.

The idea of the self-fulfilling prophecy is related to the view that social perceptions influence social reality. The self-fulfilling prophecy has been studied within the interactions of teachers and students. Jussim and Eccles (1992) looked at the self fulfilling prophecy in sixth grade teachers. They hypothesized that teachers' expectations predict how well the student does in the class, even after controlling information about the student's previous achievement. The teachers' perceptions do not predict how well the students will do on standardized test, but only the grade in their class. They predicted that students' previous success influences teachers' expectations and their expectations correlate with students' performance because they are based on information about students' previous achievements. The results of this study showed that the hypothesis was supported, and that teachers' perceptions were based on appropriate factors. Even though the teachers' perceptions did not have a direct effect on actual student performance, it had significant indirect effects. This means that the teachers' perceptions were related to the final grade of the students in the class and the standardized test. Therefore, those students that were viewed more positively at the beginning of the semester, due to their previous achievements, increased their scores in standardized tests and class grades (Jussim & Eccles, 1992). These results show how the self-fulfilling prophecy affects students' future success. This study is also important because it points out how teachers' perceptions are valid due to the information they are based on.

The previous research looked at how the self-fulfilling prophecy works on the individual level; teachers also have expectations at the class level. Rubie-Davies (2010) examined the

relationship between class performance and teacher expectations; teachers were rated as high-expectation teachers and low-expectation teachers. Results confirmed that high-expectation teachers had those attitudes for the whole class, and this was also the same for low-expectation teachers. Over the year, the students that were taught by high-expectation's teacher made more progress than those taught by low-expectation teachers (Rubie-Davis, 2010). Rubie- Davis and Jussim and Eccles' studies looked at how the teacher's self-fulfilling prophecies impact students on the individual and class level.

Sometimes these expectations and judgments happen over time, sometimes they happen automatically. The self- fulfilling prophecy is based on previous beliefs or information about a person or a group of people, and first impressions work in a similar way. Bar, Neta and Linz (2006) conducted a study that looked at the first impression formation on faces with neutral expressions. In one of the experiments in the study, the researchers looked at how fast first impressions could be formed "about a threatening personality and intelligence" (p. 269). Participants were presented with photos of faces and were asked to rate the level of how threatening the face looked, or how intelligent they looked in another condition. Researchers were not interested in the validity of the ratings, but the consistency of the ratings. To investigate this, the same faces were presented to a different group of people for a longer period of time. There were three different time conditions; 26 milliseconds, 39 milliseconds, and 1700 milliseconds. The results of this study indicated that there was a significant correlation between the ratings between the thirty-nine millisecond group and the 1700 millisecond group. The relationship was not significant between the 24 millisecond and 1700 millisecond group. The photos of the faces with threatening features that were included were the ones with the most threatening and least threatening characteristics. The researchers explained the results by stating

that threat impressions can be formed in short periods of time, due to their importance of survival. The researchers did not find the same results when the participants were asked to rate the level of intelligence of the faces in the photos. This was explained due to the nature of the characteristic being rated (Bar, Neta, & Linz, 2006).

The intelligence of others is not a characteristic that can improve our survival rate, but being able to detect if an unknown person is threatening or not can increase our chances of survival. Different groups of people form similar first impressions even when exposed to a person or photo for a short period of time. Another feature that is noticed when forming first impressions is attractiveness. Jones and Adams (1982) developed a summary report which discussed the effect and importance of beauty throughout the life span. Physical attractiveness was seen as an important factor in marriage and friendship selection, job success and marital happiness (Jones & Adams, 1982).

Research on the perception of attractiveness and intelligence agrees with the idea of the self- fulfilling prophecy. An early study by Clifford and Walster (1973) investigated how students' attractiveness influenced teachers' perceptions about their intelligence. Fifth grade teachers were presented with files about a student with information about their academic and social potential. A photo of the student was also provided with the rest of the files. Researchers used twelve different photos of children of both genders; half were rated as unattractive and half as attractive. The findings of this study showed that teachers rated attractive children as more intelligent and more positively overall. These findings were also supported by the comments that teachers provided at the end of the study. Some teachers stated that they based their predictions about the student's IQ on their "clean-cut" look (Clifford & Walster, 1973, p. 255).

Jackson, Hunter and Hodge (1995) compared the perceived intelligence and the actual intelligence of people. They found that there was no actual relationship between attractiveness and the actual intelligence in adults (Jackson, Hunter & Hodge, 1995). Yet the same relationship between attractiveness and intelligence can also be found outside the academic setting. Abramowitz and O'Grady (1990) looked at this relationship in the setting of a job interview for a peer mentor position. The same results were true; more attractive applicants were seen as more intelligent. In addition to attractiveness, the researchers also found differences in rating between female and male applicants. Female applicants were rated more positively than male applicants (Abramowitz & O'Grady, 1990). The same ideas are found true among young students. When researchers Felson and Bohrnstedt (1979) looked at how middle school children rate their peers' physical attractiveness and ability, the results showed that there was a significant effect of the perception of ability on physical attractiveness. In other words, students rated those who were more skilled as more attractive (Felson & Bohrnstedt, 1979).

Like physical attractiveness, clothing is something people used to form first impressions. It is used for information about one's socioeconomic status, personal preferences, and also intelligence. Morris, Gorham, Cohen and Huffman (1996) looked at the relationship between instructor attire and the student's perception of intelligence about the professor. There were three different conditions in this study: formal professional attire, casual professional and casual. There was a relationship between formal attire and positive rating from the students on the instructor's competence. Even though formal attire had the most positive rating, casual attire was also rated positively (Morris, Gorham, Cohen & Huffman, 1996).

A similar study was also done in a high school setting. Students and teachers from six different schools in Ohio were used as the participants of the study, and they were asked to rate

photos of students wearing four different styles of clothing: “hood”, artsy, dressy and casual. The models wearing the “hood” look wore faded jeans, t-shirts and untied tennis shoes. The artsy look was made up of trousers, low heeled shoes for girls and boat shoes for guys, and loose fitting jackets with knit shirts. The dressy condition consisted of a suit and dressy shoes. The casual look consisted of Lee or Levi jeans, sweaters, moccasins, or Nike tennis shoes. The pictures presented had the face blacked out so there would not be any external factors such as facial attractiveness and hair style affecting the study. The results indicated that overall males were rated higher in intelligence. The dressy look was perceived as the most intelligent look and the lowest rated look was the “hood” look. These findings were the same among teachers and students ratings. The teacher ratings were consistent among schools, but there were significant differences with the students’ ratings depending on the type of school they attended. Students from urban and suburban schools rated the dressy look higher, and students in rural school rated the “hood” look higher. It is important to note that the dressy look, which was a suit, was rated the highest in intelligence, even though high school students don’t wear that type of clothing to school. The researchers stated that those results may be because there is an association with suits and the image of success. The artsy look was perceived the same as the dressy look by students, but teacher rated that look more negatively. Researchers believe it is possible that students view the artsy look as fashionable. The sex of the model in the photo was significant since male models were rated higher on all looks except the artsy look. Researchers explained that teachers may see male students wearing the artsy look as intelligent but not academically strong (Behling & Williams, 1991).

Behling (1995) conducted another study in urban and suburban schools in the Midwest. There were five different clothing styles: cool, preppy, hip hop, dopers, and poor people. The

cool look was similar to the dressy look in the previous study. The preppy look consists of loafers, sweaters and khaki pants or skirts. The hip hop look was made of brand name denim and expensive sneakers. Dividends or dopers wore leather clothes, and poor people wore t-shirts with no logo, old clothes and non-branded shoes. The results were similar; the cool look, which was similar to the suit look, was rated as the most intelligent look. The preppy look was rated positively as well. Males were rated higher than females when dressed in the preppy look (Behling, 1995).

Both of the previous studies have consistent results. It appears that suits or dressed up clothing is associated with success and intelligence, even if these looks were unrealistic attires for high school settings. The poor look and hood look which consisted of old ripped clothes with no name brands carried more negative stigma. Bell's study (1991) support the findings that people dressed in formal clothing were seen as attractive, intelligent and popular. The opposite was true for those dressed in casual clothing (Bell, 1991). One of the limitations of Bell's study was that only male models were used and results cannot be generalized to female models.

This raises the question of whether the brand of clothing has an effect on an individual's perception. McDermott and Pettijohn (under review) looked at the possible relationships between clothing logos and race on perceived socioeconomic status, success, and sociability. The researchers used female models, Caucasian and African- American, wearing three different sweatshirts types: plain grey with no logo, an Abercrombie & Fitch (AF) grey logo sweatshirt and one with a Kmart logo on it. The results indicated that the models wearing the AF sweatshirt were rated the highest in socioeconomic status and the ones wearing the Kmart sweatshirt the lowest.

A couple of other factors that influence perceived attractiveness is how sexually alluring the clothes are and the color of the clothes. Williamson and Hewitt (1986) found that women rated other women wearing sexually alluring clothing as less attractive, and men found women more attractive when wearing sexually alluring clothing. The clothing color of interest for this study is red. The color red is often a "symbol of eros, lust, and fertility" and it also associated with the meaning of sex and romance in contemporary times (Elliot et al., 2010). A study done by Elliot and Niesta (2008) showed that men viewed women on a red background as more attractive than women on white, grey or green background. On the contrary, women did not view other women as more attractive when they were presented on a red background. The researchers concluded that while the color red has an impact on attraction, the results do not extend to positivity in other general characteristics such as kindness. Niesta, Elliot and Feltman (2010) conducted another study to examine the effect of the color red on behavior. They concluded that the color effects men's behavior to be more romantic. For example, men sat closer to women wearing red than blue. They also asked more intimate questions towards women wearing red than green. These findings reinforce the idea that men are more attracted to women wearing red.

The hypothesis of this study was that female students wearing formal attire will be perceived as more intelligent and have more positive ratings overall than students wearing provocative or casual clothing styles. It was also predicted that students wearing casual clothing will receive the lowest intelligence rating and more negative ratings. Male and female professors' scoring were predicted to be the same on the conditions of formal and casual attire. This hypothesis is supported by past research which states that professional attire is associated with high intellect (Morris, Gorham, Cohen & Huffman, 1996). The model wearing the provocative clothing will be rated more positively from male professors and more negatively

from female professors. The color red of the dress is expected to increase attraction of the male professors to the female model, and as a result increase positive ratings

Method

Participants

Coastal Carolina University professors (25 males, 19 females) were recruited for this study through an email sent to faculty from the science, education and humanities department. The email described the purpose of the study and a link to the online survey. There were a total of 45 participants, but one participant did not answer the demographic questions. 13 percent of the participants have a Master's Degree, 71 percent have a Ph.D., and 13 percent of have a professional degree such as MD or JD.9 percent of participants were part of the College of Education, 42 percent were part of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts, and 44 percent were part of the College of Science.

Materials and Procedure

Participants of the study completed an online survey that consisted of four components: personal statement, photo, Brownfair's trait survey and a demographic survey. All participants read a one page personal statement written by a college student applying to law school (See Appendix A). This is meant to add more content to the photos because it is a task that all college students do at some point during their academic career.

The participants were randomly assigned through the online survey website to one of the four conditions: control, formal attire, casual attire, provocative attire. The control condition did not include a photo of a student, but they were presented with the personal statement. The formal

attire condition consisted of a photo of a student wearing a black suit with a white button down shirt and black shoes. The casual attire condition consisted of dark wash jeans, teal t-shirt, black sweater and flip- flops. The provocative attire condition consisted of a red dress the fell four inches above the knee and exposed skin from the chest, arm and leg area (See Appendix B).

After reading the survey participants were asked to grade the personal statement and complete Brownfair's (1952) survey. They also answered general demographic questions (See Appendix C). This survey measured traits in three dimensions: intellectual, social and physical (Browfair, 1952).

Results

To analyze the data a 2 (Professor Sex: [male or female] x4 (Condition [formal attire, provocative attire, casual attire or no photo]) factorial ANOVA was conducted. Neither of the professor sex main effect, F (1, 42) = 1.232, p= 0.274, or the condition main effect, F (3,40) =2.019, p =0.129, were statistically significant. As shown on Table 1, there also was not a statistically significant interaction between professor sex and condition, F (3, 40) =.773, p= .517. These results indicate that the sex of the professor grading and rating the student did not have an effect on the grade that they assigned or their rating on Brownfair's survey.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the four conditions. There was a marginally significant difference between conditions for essay grade, F (3, 41)=2.279, p=.094. Individual comparisons showed no significant difference between the red dress condition, formal attire condition, casual attire condition and no photo condition. There was a significant difference between conditions for self- confidence, cheerfulness, individualism, and grade in the class. Individual comparisons showed that these differences were between the red dress

condition and the no photo condition. Post Hoc testing indicates that there was only a significant effect between the red dress condition and the no photo condition in self- confidence, *p*= .003, cheerfulness, *p*= .009, individualism, *p*= .013, class grade, *p*= .038. As shown on Table 2 and on Figure, from comparing the means of these significant attributes it was evident that the red dress condition received the lowest mean rating and the no photo condition received the highest rating. There were no statistically significant differences for the attributes of intelligence, maturity, reliability, sincerity, sociability, popularity and attractiveness.

Discussion

The results of this study did not support the original hypothesis. There was no statistically significant effect for intelligence between groups, and due to that we reject the hypotheses about intelligence. Formal attire was not rated as more intelligent and casual attire was not rated as the least intelligent. Results also indicated that there was no main effect for gender and condition, and no interaction effect of the two. Therefore we can conclude that the sex of the professors did not have an effect on the grading or rating of the student.

These results are inconsistent with previous studies that indicated that formal attire would be rated as the most intelligent (Behling & Williams, 1991). Several reasons may explain the inconsistency of the results of this study. The small sample size of the participants and the heterogeneity of the participants' sex may have caused the results. After reviewing previous research it was evident that the majority of the studies on this field were conducted nearly a decade ago. Those studies may be outdated and social perceptions about clothing and perceived intelligence may have changed. Another trend in previous research was the education level of the participants. The majority of the studies were conducted in the high school or middle school

setting. Some of those were the research conducted by Clifford and Walster (1973), Behling & Williams, (1991) and Behling (1995). Due to the higher education of university professors, they may not hold the same attitudes as middle school or high school teachers. The difference in education on the participants in previous studies is a limitation because their results may not be generalized to the university setting.

Another limitation is the location of the samples that were used. Behling's (1995) study was conducted in urban and suburban schools in the Midwest. The researcher chose particular clothing styles that were relevant and popular for those school settings. This is important because individuals who live in that area may have different socioeconomic statuses than the people who reside in the Southeastern area. This could be an issue because people from different socioeconomic groups may be more exposed to certain clothing styles. For example, someone who comes from developed suburban areas might be exposed to suits more often than someone who comes from a poor rural area. Therefore, people from suburban areas might have the association of the suit with success.

For future research, the study should be replicated to detect the reliability of the results. It would be beneficial if a larger sample size could be attained, and have the same number of male and female participants. An extension of this research should investigate the effect of male students' clothing style of college professors' perceptions. Another suggestion for future research is improving the method of the research so the study is more experimental. This could be done by having students with particular clothing styles interact with professors, instead of showing photos of students wearing certain clothing styles.

The importance of this research is its contemporary investigation on previously studied topics. This research also adds to previous scholarship by looking at the perceptions of college professors, which is something that has not been done before. The location of the sample size is also original compared to previous studies. This study provides understanding to how college professors' perceptions about female students' intelligence is influenced by clothing styles.

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Table 1

Test of Between-Subjects Effects

	Type III SS	df	Mean Sq	F	p
Corrected Model	6.055	7	0.865	1.389	0.24
Intercept	259.512	1	259.512	416.66	0.000
gender	0.767	1	0.767	1.232	0.274
condition	3.772	3	1.257	2.019	0.129
gender*condition	1.445	3	0.482	0.773	0.517
Error	22.422	36	0.623		
Total	298.5	44			
Corrected Total	28.477	43			

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviation for One –Way ANOVA

	Condition				
	Suit	Red dress	casual	no photo	p value
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	
Grade essay	2.25(.950)	2.15(.427)	2.77(.929)	2.82(.808)	0.94
Intelligence	3.50(.707)	3.38(.506)	3.55(.522)	3.82(.982)	0.5
Mature	3.30(.823)	2.92(.862)	3.55(.688)	3.445(1.128	.335
Self-confidence	3.60(.823)	3.15(.689)	3.55(.522)	4.18(.603)	**0.007**
Reliable	3.10(.568)	2.92(.641)	3.09(.539)	3.36(.674)	**.**383
Sincere	3.50(1.18)	2.92(.641)	3.09(.539)	3.36(.674)	**.**503
Cheerfulness	3.10(.738)	2.85(.899)	3.09(.701)	3.91(.701)	**0.012**
Individualistic	3.20(.632)	2.62(.768)	3.09(.302)	3.55(.934)	**0.022**
Social	3.20(.632)	2.92(.641)	3.09(.302)	3.45(.688)	.184
Popular	3.0(.471)	2.92(.494)	3.0(.000)	3.09(.302)	.758
Attractive	3.20(.422)	3.31(.480)	3.0(.000)	3.09(.302)	0.195
Grade class	2.35(.851)	2.15(.427)	2.68(.681)	2.95(.820)	**0.042**

Note. All p- values that are bolded mean that there is a statistically significant difference between conditions in depended variables

Figure

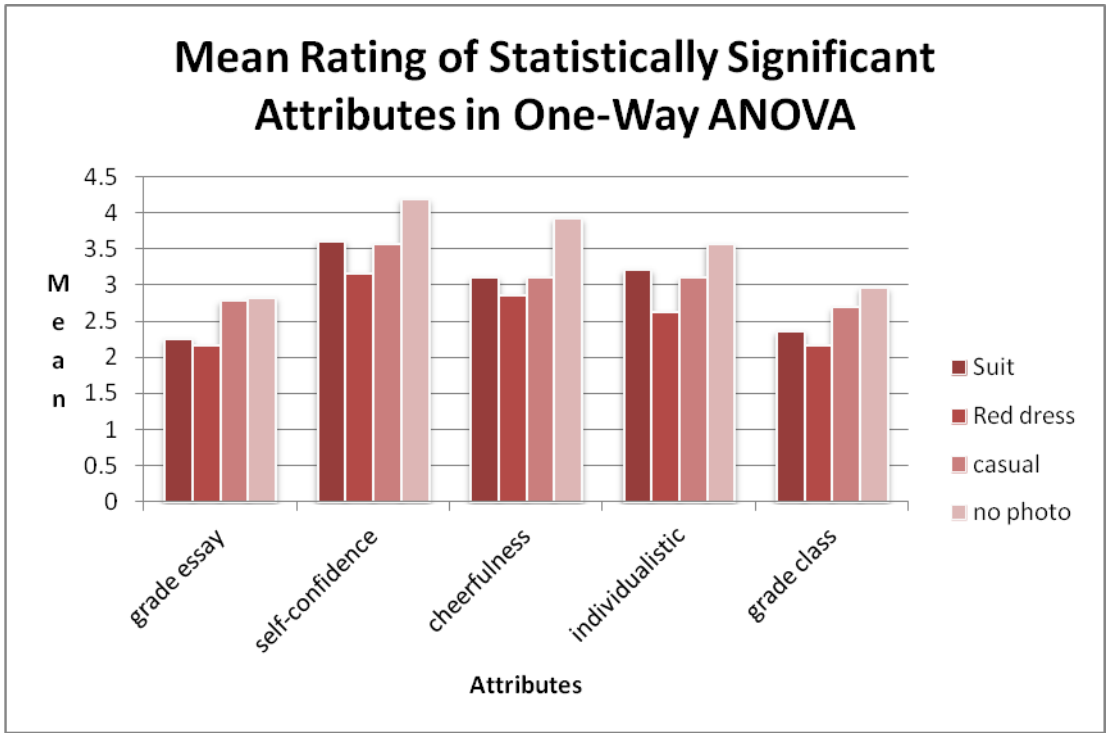

Figure. E. Mean rating of statistically significant attributes between conditions shows that the red dress condition was rated the lowest in each attributes and the no photo condition received the highest rating.

Appendix A

Personal Statement

During my first year of college, I had delayed declaring a major. By my second year, although I thought that I might eventually want to pursue a law degree, I decided to get my undergraduate degree in Accounting. My interest in law began at a very young age. As a child I endured many crises: I was eight and my sister was six when she was diagnosed with leukemia; my parents divorced during the years when she was undergoing treatments; also, I suffered the loss of a cousin through vehicular homicide during that same period. I knew that my mother had a lot on her plate, but there were times I still felt abandoned. At the same time, my heart was breaking for my sister who was in and out of hospitals and undergoing some hideous treatments. While the average person may view these circumstances as negative, I believe these experiences helped form the person I am today.

During my second year of college, at Coastal Carolina University, circumstances reinforced my resolve to study law, and to become a lawyer with the long term goal of becoming a Circuit Court Judge. What helped me come to this decision? It was a bittersweet day for me in 2009, enduring a mind-numbing Accounting class, when I began to question my choice of major. Excited to be starting a new year, but questioning my actions for enrolling in the class in the first place, I had begun to have doubts about Accounting as a major. Nevertheless, I wanted to give it my best effort and see where it would lead.

My organizational skills, as well as my attentiveness to detail, led me to believe Accounting could be a potential career path for me. The thought of week after week, sitting in class with numbers running through my mind like symbols on a stock market ticker tape, and hearing the words: "Debits", "Credits", "Balance Sheets" and "Income Statements" began to take its toll. I knew I could not endure the wrath of this terribly dull subject any longer. It was overwhelming, knowing that my heart was not in it. Simultaneously, positive thoughts from readings in my other Liberal Arts classes began to entice me. I was beginning to think more and more of a future in the field of Law. The more I thought about it, the more excited I became. The passion grew as I remembered incidents growing-up, thinking that someday I was going to "make a significant contribution" to society...I was going to make a difference! Not only did I want to study law and become a lawyer, I wanted to be a Judge. It was time to meet with my advisor, and make the necessary changes.

Appendix B

Photos

Appendix C

Surveys

Demographic Survey

What is your race?

-Caucasian

-African-American

-Hispanic

-Native American

-Other

What is your highest level of education?

-4-year college degree (BS, BA)

-Master's Degree

-Doctoral Degree

-Professional Degree (MD,JD)

What College are you part of?

-College of Business

-College of Education

-College of Humanities and Fine Arts

-College of Science

Additional Information Survey

-Please grade this student's personal statement as if it was part of an assignment for you class. What grade would they receive?

A B+ B C+ C D F

Additional Information

-If the student was in your class, what grade do you believe they would receive?

A B+ B C+ C D F

-Briefly explain why this grade was given?

-What do you believe this student's GPA is on a 4.0 scale?

-What was the student in the photo wearing?

Brownfair's Personal Trait Survey

Please rate the student on the photo on these categories on a five point scale. 1 being the most favorable attribute and 5 being the lowest

-Intellectual attributes

Intelligent (1) to unintelligent (5)

Mature (1) to immature (5)

Self confident (1) to uncertain (5)

Reliable (1) to unreliable (5)

-Social attributes

Sincere (1) to insincere (5)

Cheerful (1) to gloomy (5)

Individualistic (1) to conformistic (5)

Sociable (1) to unsociable (5)

Popular (1) to unpopular (5)

-Physical attributes

Attractive (1) to unattractive (5)