

## EFFECT OF WEARING EYEGLASSES ON JUDGMENT OF SOCIOPROFESSIONAL GROUP MEMBERSHIP

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Several researchers have reported that people photographed wearing eyeglasses were perceived as being more intelligent and honest than people who were not wearing them. In this study, conducted in France, I tried to replicate this effect using a forced-choice situation. Participants viewed a photograph of a male target wearing, or not wearing, eyeglasses and were instructed to estimate his socioprofessional group using a well-known French list. Results showed that, compared with the target without eyeglasses, the target wearing eyeglasses was more frequently associated with a higher status socioprofessional group and less often with midstatus or low-status socioprofessional groups. These results confirmed that a common cue of facial appearance is sufficient to activate a stereotype of social group membership.

*Keywords:* wearing eyeglasses, not wearing eyeglasses, facial appearance, judgment, socio-professional group, stereotype.

An obvious feature of an individual's appearance that has received little attention from social psychologists is the presence of eyeglasses. In France, nearly 71% of the population wears eyeglasses (Ipsos Healthcare, 2012), and the percentage of people wearing eyeglasses increases with age. In psychological research, it has been shown that the presence of eyeglasses influences an observer's judgment of the person wearing the eyeglasses. In the first study in which eyeglasses and social perception were examined, Thornton (1943) found that individuals photographed wearing eyeglasses were rated significantly higher in intelligence, dependability, industriousness, and honesty than the same targets when photographed without eyeglasses. This positive effect of wearing eyeglasses has been reported in several later studies conducted in countries such

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as Germany (Manz & Lueck, 1968), Japan (Saito, 1978), Sweden (Hellström & Tekle, 1994), and Austria (Leder, Forster, & Gerger, 2011). However, researchers have also reported that a target wearing eyeglasses was not always perceived positively. For example, Elman (1977) found that participants judged a male target who was wearing eyeglasses as weaker and more of a follower than when he was not wearing them. Terry and Krantz (1993) also reported that male and female targets who were wearing eyeglasses were associated with the characteristics of diminished forcefulness. In addition, wearing eyeglasses has been associated with less sociality (Terry & Macy, 1991) and being less physically attractive (Edwards, 1987; Hasart & Hutchinson, 1993).

Despite some divergent results concerning traits attributed to targets wearing eyeglasses, most researchers have consistently shown that wearing eyeglasses is strongly associated with a higher score for perceived intelligence. My objective was to examine whether or not the traits related to intelligence were also associated with wearing eyeglasses. I conducted this study in France, where the effect of wearing eyeglasses has never been studied. Participants were asked to associate a target wearing or not wearing eyeglasses with a socioprofessional group. Researchers have reported that information related to the socioprofessional status of a target has influenced observers' judgment of the target (Black & Gold, 2008). As researchers have shown that intelligence is positively correlated with socioprofessional status (Firkowska-Mankiewicz, 2011; Furnham & Cheng, 2013), I hypothesized that a target wearing eyeglasses would be more frequently associated with membership of a high-status socioprofessional group than would the same target when not wearing eyeglasses.

## Method

### Participants

The participants were 50 men and 50 women (between the ages of approximately 20 and 50 years), who were randomly approached when they were standing or walking alone either in a shopping mall or at the train station, in a town with a population of between 60,000 and 70,000 on the south coast of Brittany in France.

### Procedure

I recruited four female confederates aged either 19 or 20 years, who asked passersby to participate in a survey of the judgment of a person, which was based on a photograph of that individual. The clothing of each confederate was nearly identical: black trousers and a black long-sleeved tee-shirt worn under a white tee-shirt. To avoid possible variations in the confederates' behavior according to the experimental conditions, the confederates were not informed of the experimental hypothesis.

Participants were selected by counting the passage of a definite number of individuals in a defined zone. The profile for selection was a man or a woman aged between approximately 20 and 50 years. If a child, a teenager, a man or woman aged over 50, or a group went past at the point when the count of passersby had reached the set number, the confederate waited until an individual who corresponded to the profile came along. The confederate showed those who accepted the invitation to participate a sheet of white paper with a 20 × 15 cm color photograph of the face of a 35-year-old man printed on it. According to the experimental condition, the male target was either wearing, or not wearing, eyeglasses. The eyeglasses had been added to the image using graphic software to maintain exactly the same facial expression in the two experimental conditions. The participant was instructed to look carefully at the photograph and to estimate the socioprofessional group to which the target belonged. A well-known list of seven categories of socioprofessional groups that is frequently used in France was presented to the participant, comprising: (a) farmer, (b) artisan or merchant, (c) executive or highly intellectual occupation, (d) middle executive, (e) office worker, (f) manual worker, and (g) unemployed. The confederate noted the participant's response on a form, and then thanked the participant for his or her help. Half of the participants viewed the face without eyeglasses and the other half viewed it with eyeglasses.

## Results

The dependent variable was the number of times a socioprofessional group was selected by the participants. The data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Frequency of Attribution of a Socioprofessional Group in the Two Experimental Conditions*

	Eyeglasses ( <i>n</i> = 50)	No eyeglasses ( <i>n</i> = 50)
Farmer	0	4
Artisan or merchant	10	13
Executive or highly intellectual occupation	29	13
Middle executive	3	9
Office worker	6	5
Manual worker	1	4
Unemployed	1	2

To account for the possible effects of the variables, an independent chi-square test was performed and revealed a significant interaction,  $\chi^2(1, N = 100) = 15.7, p = .015, r = .39$ . Further interaction revealed that significantly more participants selected a higher status socioprofessional group in the wearing

eyeglasses condition than in the not wearing eyeglasses condition,  $\chi^2(1, N = 100) = 19.31, p < .001, r = .44$ . Results of analysis comparing male and female participants' responses showed no gender difference.

## Discussion

These findings showed that both male and female participants attributed a high-status socioprofessional category more frequently to the target wearing eyeglasses. My findings are consistent with previous findings on the effect on an observer's judgment of the presence or absence of eyeglasses in a photograph of an individual. Several researchers have reported that the presence of eyeglasses led people to judge the target more positively, particularly when assessing personality traits.

Most researchers have reported that, when a target was wearing eyeglasses, this was associated with a higher score for perceived intelligence (Hellström & Tekle, 1994; Leder et al., 2011; Manz & Lueck, 1968; Saito, 1978; Thornton, 1943). The results of this study also confirmed that this dimension was an important one for judging people with eyeglasses. Being highly intelligent and having excellent intellectual abilities are important traits for a job in a higher socioprofessional category. In France, where this study was conducted, this group also has a higher level of income.

There are a number of limitations in this experiment. The size of the sample did not permit me to analyze the data according to the age and socioprofessional group of the participants. Thus, to generalize the findings, a larger sample size is necessary. In addition, I used only one male target in this study. It would be interesting to replicate this study using several targets of both men and women.

In this study I have reported that, when an individual is wearing eyeglasses, this exerts an important effect on an observer's judgment of that individual. This finding suggests that there is a need to further develop this topic. From a practical point of view, studying the effect of such a subtle factor in facial appearance appears important. Indeed, I have shown that the presence of eyeglasses influenced the observers' judgment of a target. This, in turn, could influence social interaction with an individual who wears eyeglasses, or a decision made about that individual, for example, evaluation of a job applicant's curriculum vitae. Therefore, the results indicate the advisability of the exclusion of a photograph in a curriculum vitae in job applications.

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