

PERCEPTIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE SMILES

VONDA WILLIAMS

PERCEPTIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE SMILES

An Abstract

Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

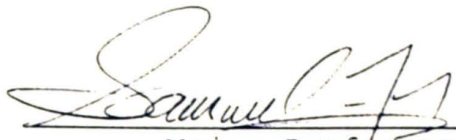
by

Vonda Williams

October 1992

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I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Vonda Williams entitled "Perceptions of Male and Female Smiles." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Science with a major in Guidance and Counseling.

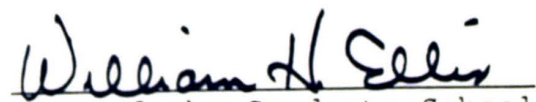

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of male and female smiling and nonsmiling faces. Three hypotheses were tested. The first hypothesis was that each of the smiling faces would be rated more positively than the nonsmiling faces. The second hypothesis was that the male smiling face would be rated more positively than the female smiling face, and the male nonsmiling face would be rated more positively than the female nonsmiling face. The third hypothesis was that the male smiling face would be rated most positively, followed by the female smiling face, the male nonsmiling face and then the female nonsmiling face.

One hundred thirty-six students volunteered to participate from psychology classes at Austin Peay State University. Each subject viewed and rated four photographs individually of a female smiling face, a male smiling face, a female nonsmiling face, and a male nonsmiling face. Significant results were found for each of the three hypotheses. The results indicated that females were perceived as cold and harsh when they did not smile and that males were perceived as especially friendly and caring when they smiled.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Smiling is a facial gesture that signals positive mood or emotion and is probably a universal indication of positive affect (Provine & Fisher, 1989). Smiling is a powerful nonverbal signal of warmth in interpersonal relationships and is more likely to happen in situations in which people feel love, liking, and happiness, and in which they want to use positive interpersonal sentiment (McAdams, Jackson & Kirshnit, 1984). Since a smiling face is an indication of positive affect, a smile may positively influence how one is being perceived (Deutsch, LeBaron & Fryer, 1987). Likewise, a nonsmiling face may also change how one is being perceived. Tel (1988) reports that if we smile at a potential respondent, they are more likely to return a smile. Research (McAdams, Jackson and Kirshnit, 1984) suggests that there are differences in frequency, duration, motivation and reciprocation between genders and smiling faces. The differences between males and females are that females smile more often and for a longer duration than their male counterparts. Piliavin and Martin (1978) demonstrate that there are differences in the ways that males and females present themselves in interpersonal situations. They suggest that females may have been socialized to view themselves and to present themselves as more friendly and more sociable than males. In our culture,

females are commonly taught to look and act "pretty" and that they may publicly express their emotions, while males are not expected to express their emotions (Morse, 1982). Smiling is a nonverbal way of expressing emotion, and since females express emotion more freely in our society, they tend to smile more often than males. Emotional expression is acceptable, even expected, for females and not for males, thus it may be assumed that females are expected to smile while males are not expected to smile. Perceptions may be made based on facial expressions, and since smiling behavior is different for males and females, so are expectations and therefore perceptions.

The purpose of this study was to explore the different expectations and perceptions of facial expressions (smiling or nonsmiling) for males and females. It is assumed that the nonsmiling expression is expected for males while the smiling expression is expected for females. Based on this assumption, it seems that smiling males would be perceived more positively than smiling females, since their smiling behavior does not occur as frequently and is not expected of them as often. Therefore, it seems that smiling faces would be judged more positively than nonsmiling faces, and a male smiling face would be judged more positively than a female smiling face. Similarly, it appears that a female nonsmiling face would be judged more harshly than a male nonsmiling face.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

The ability to smile and to recognize a smile seems well developed very early in life, according to Lau (1982). Infants, for example, are known to respond to a smile with a smile. Lau also found that smiling persons are evaluated more positively than nonsmiling persons. Smiling appears to be related to an emotional response. Babad, Alexander, and Babad (1983) compared the tendency of children's smiles to the tendency of the mother's smile. Results indicate that smiling children are more affective and interactive with their mothers. Nonsmiling children tend to be and have mothers who tend to be more exacting, controlling, dominating, and punishing, suggesting that the willingness and tendency to return a smile is an indication of overall affectivity. Smiles have also been found to play an important role in nonverbal behavior (Walsh & Hewitt, 1985). According to this research, when smiles are joined with eye contact by a female in a social setting, approachment by males is significantly higher than eye contact without smiles.

Provine and Fisher (1989) asked college students to keep a daily log of laughing, smiling and talking. They found that smiling is most likely to be performed in social situations, primarily during social encounters in which smiles are part of verbal and nonverbal communication.

Morse (1982) studied the frequency of male and female smiles by observing college photographs. His data clearly indicate that females smile more frequently for college yearbook pictures than do males. Morse suggests that in our culture, females are taught to express emotions other than anger, while males are not expected to express their emotions. Through recording expectations and perceptions of observations made of the confederate, Reeder, Fletcher, and Freeman (1989) noted that perceivers tend to overestimate behavioral consistency. According to this study, it is suggested that society expects behavioral consistency with facial expressions, smiling for females and nonsmiling for males.

Berman and Smith (1984) observed male and female smiles along with touch and proxemics. They found that females smile significantly more often than males and mutually touch each other more often. McAdams, Jackson, and Kirshnit (1984) also found significantly higher levels of smiling for women than for men by investigating looking, laughter and smiling behavior in relation to nonverbal dyads, intimacy motivation, and gender. Bugental (1986) however, studied women's smiling behavior and found that women smile in both appropriate and inappropriate smiling situations. He concluded that women tend to smile, producing a "polite smile," even in inappropriate smiling situations. According to Halberstadt, Hayes, and Pike (1988), smiling was

associated with femininity because of interpersonal orientation, social warmth, and expressiveness. They observed college students' conversations about emotional experiences and analyzed them for smiling frequency and duration. They found that women smile more frequently than men and for a longer duration, especially when discussing positive topics. Their gender role results indicate that masculinity influenced men's and women's smiling quite differently, suggesting that men and women may smile for different reasons. Men and women have different personality traits that may indicate motivational differences in smiling.

Studies indicate that women smile more often than men and that they have motivational differences for doing so. Since smiles are typical of women, they are expected from women and convey little unique information about women. Men, on the other hand, smile less often. Therefore, a smiling man conveys a great deal of positive information about himself, like a nonsmiling woman conveys negative information about herself. When men smile, it is considered out-of-role behavior and therefore is perceived more positively, relative to women's smiling faces. That is, they would be perceived as having more of the characteristics associated with smiling than nonsmiling faces, such as happiness, warmth and sensitiveness. It is suggested that different standards are applied to men and women (Jones &

Davis, 1965; Jones & McGillis, 1976).

According to Wallace (1971), each of us has a clear-cut idea for behavior. We make assumptions about others knowing little more than their social roles. These preconceived notions may influence our perceptions of others when we have little information about them. Although one may be able to predict some characteristics of persons, it is clear that these inferences may lead to distorted pictures of many persons. When we fail to vary our observations across a variety of situations, we often conclude that a given characteristic is a property of the person, rather than a sample of behavior in a given situation; for example, smiling or not smiling in that given situation. When we make judgements or form opinions of others, we hold our own experiences, beliefs, values, emotions, attitudes, and expectations, and we are unable to form a unbiased perception. These unbiased perceptions are not only based upon our experiences, but also upon our thoughts about the individual or the group in which the individual belongs, which is stereotyping.

Hamilton, Sherman, and Ruvolo (1990) define stereotype as the perceiver's knowledge and beliefs about a group (in this case, men and women) and its members. A stereotype is an important source of expectancies about what the group as a whole is like, as well as attributes that individual members are likely to possess. Properties of the perceiver

(beliefs, memory) and information given can affect what the individual perceives. The information given (smiling or nonsmiling facial expression) becomes the basis for several processes by which the individual expands and elaborates to form a new perception. Pratto and Bargh (1989) studied stereotyping of the global components of sex stereotypes under attention overload. They found that physical cues, such as smiling or nonsmiling faces, have been noted by many investigators. For example, Deaux and Lewis (1984) found that information about a target's physical characteristics had a strong effect on stereotypes made about that individual when compared to opinions made about the individual when information about physical characteristics was not given. Stereotypes lead to unfavorable expectations which may result in self-fulfilling prophesies: smiling for women and fewer smiles for men (Snyder, 1984). Expectations may lead to perceptual biases. These biases may influence the perceivers' interpretation of social events or their perceptions of people, based on their expectations.

Deutsch, LeBaron, and Fryer (1987) studied the perceptions of smiling and nonsmiling women. They found that the absence of smiles has a greater impact on perceptions of women than on perceptions of men. The failure to smile was evaluated less favorably in women than in men. Nonsmiling women are viewed as less happy, colder, and more tense than nonsmiling males. Since female

nonsmiling expressions are rated less favorably than the male and female smiling faces, as well as the male nonsmiling face, this study intends to investigate perceptions of male and female smiling and nonsmiling faces comparatively rated. The hypotheses for this study are:

- 1) All smiling faces will be rated more positively than the nonsmiling faces.
- 2) When males and females are comparatively rated, male smiling faces will be rated more positively than female smiling faces, and male nonsmiling faces will be rated more positively than female nonsmiling faces.
- 3) Male smiling faces will be rated most positively, followed by female smiling faces, male nonsmiling faces, and then female nonsmiling faces.

CHAPTER 3

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 136 Austin Peay State University student volunteers, (92 females and 44 males) from different psychology classes. Subjects received extra credit for participating in this experiment. Each subject viewed the same set of photos and rated the photos on a provided scale.

Materials

A set of four black and white pictures of four different people, taken from Ekman's and Friesen's book, Unmasking The Face (1988), were used in this experiment, (see Appendix A). These were randomly arranged and then shown in fixed order: female smiling face, male smiling face, female nonsmiling face, and male nonsmiling face. All four pictures were shown separately over an opaque projector to a group of 2-6 subjects. Subjects rated the pictures on a 5 point bipolar scale which was based on Deutsch's bipolar scale (see Appendix B). The traits used for this scale were happy-sad, serious-carefree, warm-cold, tense-relaxed, likable-unlikable, rude-polite, insensitive-sensitive, successful-unsuccessful, unfriendly-friendly, and outgoing-withdrawn. The positive and negative traits were reversed on each line of the scale. Mean scores were computed by adding the scores from each pair of traits. These scores were computed meaning that the lower the score, the more

friendly, warm, and carefree the individual in the picture was judged to be. In contrast, the higher the score, the less sensitive, less friendly and less happy the person in the picture was judged to be.

Procedure

Subjects were directed to the experiment room in groups of 2-6, at which time they were asked to read and sign an informed consent statement (see Appendix C). Questionnaires were handed out along with written instructions (see Appendix B). Oral instructions also were given to clear any confusion. Each of the four photographs were shown individually for approximately one minute, at which time the subjects rated the photographs on the scale provided. After completion of the scale, the questionnaires were gathered. Subjects were given an opportunity to ask questions pertaining to this experiment.

CHAPTER 4

Results

One hundred thirty-six of the 139 questionnaires completed were included in the report of results. Statistics were obtained by randomly dividing the questionnaires into four equal cell size groups, with a total of 34 questionnaires in each group, leaving 3 extra questionnaires, which were not included in the analysis. In each of the four groups, the ratings for only one of the pictures was studied, for example; in group one, only the ratings for smiling female were examined. Therefore, in each of the four groups a different picture was studied. Mean scores were computed meaning that the lower the score, the more positively the person was judged to be and the higher the score the more negatively the person was judged to be (see Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

Picture	N	Mean Rating	Standard Dev.
Smiling Female	34	21.76	3.710
Smiling Male	34	15.76	3.916
Nonsmiling Female	34	44.17	4.064
Nonsmiling Male	34	35.35	3.805

using t-test comparisons. A significant difference was found between each group comparison (see Table 2). The smiling male ($\bar{X} = 15.76$) was rated significantly more positively than the smiling female ($\bar{X} = 21.76$; $t(66) = 6.49$, $p < .000$). The smiling male also rated significantly more positively than the nonsmiling female ($\bar{X} = 44.17$; $t(66) = -29.35$, $p < .000$) and nonsmiling male ($\bar{X} = 35.35$; $t(66) = -20.92$, $p < .000$). The smiling female was only rated significantly more positively than the two nonsmiling individuals: nonsmiling female ($t(66) = -23.75$, $p < .000$), nonsmiling male ($t(66) = -14.91$, $p < .000$).

Table 2
t-Analysis for Mean Differences

	<u>Degrees of Freedom</u>	<u>t Value</u>	<u>Probability</u>
Smiling Female vs. Smiling Male	66	6.49	.000
Smiling Male vs. Nonsmiling Female	66	-29.35	.000
Smiling Female vs. Nonsmiling Male	66	-14.91	.000
Smiling Female vs. Nonsmiling Female	66	-23.75	.000
Smiling Male vs. Nonsmiling Male	66	-20.92	.000
Nonsmiling Female vs. Nonsmiling Male	66	9.24	.000

A significant difference was also noticed between the nonsmiling individuals: the nonsmiling female and nonsmiling male ($t = 9.24$, $p < .000$). The nonsmiling female had mean differences significantly higher than the nonsmiling male, i.e., the nonsmiling female was rated to be more cold and harsh than the nonsmiling male.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

This study investigated three hypotheses: 1) Each of the smiling faces will be rated more positively than the nonsmiling faces. 2) When males and females are comparatively rated, the male smiling face will be rated more positively than the female smiling face, and the male nonsmiling face will be rated more positively than the female nonsmiling face. 3) The male smiling face will be rated the most positively, followed by the female smiling face, male nonsmiling face and then the female nonsmiling face.

The findings of this experiment supported the three hypotheses. Male and female smiling faces were rated more positively than the male and female nonsmiling faces. The male smiling face was rated more positively than the female smiling face, likewise, the male nonsmiling face was rated more positively than the female nonsmiling face. When the order of the photographs were ranked in order of how positively they were perceived, the male smiling face was rated the most positively, followed by the female smiling face, the male nonsmiling face, and then the female nonsmiling face.

Researchers have noted that females smile more often than males (Morse, 1982; Berman and Smith, 1984). These results indicate that the lack of a smile produces less

favorable ratings for the female, when compared to a smiling female, to a smiling male, and a to nonsmiling male. It is assumed that males are not expected to smile and that females are. Since females are expected to smile, when they do not, they are perceived as cold and harsh. On the other hand, when the male, who is not expected to smile, fails to smile, he is given a more favorable rating; rating significantly more favorably than the nonsmiling female. The smiling female, exhibiting her expected behavior, receives a favorable rating, although it is less favorable than the smiling male and more favorable than the nonsmiling individuals. When comparing the smiling female, expected behavior, to the smiling male, unexpected behavior, the smiling male received significantly more positive results. These results suggest that in our culture we do not expect men to smile, so when they do, they are perceived as especially outgoing, sensitive, and friendly; whereas the female is expected to smile, and when she fails to produce a smile, she is perceived as cold, harsh and unlikable. This study indicates that our society has strong stereotypes about the facial expressions of males and females. This stereotype is unfair to women. Because they are taught to express emotion more freely than men, including happiness and other positive attributes, women have become expected to express positive emotions. They may even feel pressure from our society to present a happy face, even when it is not

felt (Ekman & Friesen, 1982). A nonsmiling face may not reflect coldness and harshness in men nor does it reflect coldness and harshness in women, it is based on perception. A smiling face, on the other hand, might not necessarily reflect warmth and caring, although it is perceived that way, especially in men. Because a man is displaying a smiling face, it may not mean that he is any more loving or caring than his female smiling counterpart. Strong stereotypes about the perceptions of facial expressions between the genders in our society have been revealed and supported in this study.

Possible future study related to this experiment could be to study cultural, gender, age, and racial differences in the perceptions of male and female smiling and nonsmiling faces. The photographs that were viewed by the subjects could be changed to color photographs or could include different races or ethnic groups. A written or oral scenario to include a situation in which it is appropriate or inappropriate to smile could be accompanied with the photographs.

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Appendix A



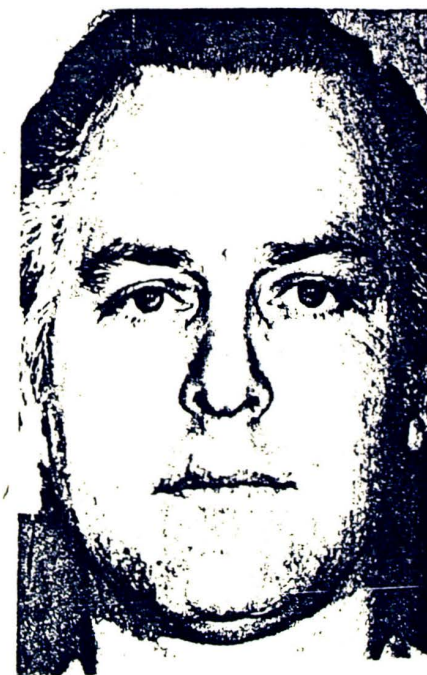
A



B



C



D

Appendix B

QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions:

You will be viewing four different pictures. Rate each one according to the scales underneath. For example, if you find the person in picture A to be very happy, then place a check in the space close to "happy", if you find them to be unhappy, then place the check next to "unhappy".

Person A

Happy	—	—	—	—	Sad
Serious	—	—	—	—	Carefree
Warm	—	—	—	—	Cold
Tense	—	—	—	—	Relaxed
Likable	—	—	—	—	Unlikable
Rude	—	—	—	—	Polite
Insensitive	—	—	—	—	Sensitive
Successful	—	—	—	—	Unsuccessful
Unfriendly	—	—	—	—	Friendly
Outgoing	—	—	—	—	Withdrawn

Person B

Happy	—	—	—	—	Sad
Serious	—	—	—	—	Carefree
Warm	—	—	—	—	Cold
Tense	—	—	—	—	Relaxed
Likable	—	—	—	—	Unlikable
Rude	—	—	—	—	Polite
Insensitive	—	—	—	—	Sensitive
Successful	—	—	—	—	Unsuccessful
Unfriendly	—	—	—	—	Friendly
Outgoing	—	—	—	—	Withdrawn

Person C

Happy	—	—	—	—	Sad
Serious	—	—	—	—	Carefree
Warm	—	—	—	—	Cold
Tense	—	—	—	—	Relaxed
Likable	—	—	—	—	Unlikable
Rude	—	—	—	—	Polite
Insensitive	—	—	—	—	Sensitive
Successful	—	—	—	—	Unsuccessful
Unfriendly	—	—	—	—	Friendly
Outgoing	—	—	—	—	Withdrawn

Person D

Happy	—	—	—	—	Sad
Serious	—	—	—	—	Carefree
Warm	—	—	—	—	Cold
Tense	—	—	—	—	Relaxed
Likable	—	—	—	—	Unlikable
Rude	—	—	—	—	Polite
Insensitive	—	—	—	—	Sensitive
Successful	—	—	—	—	Unsuccessful
Unfriendly	—	—	—	—	Friendly
Outgoing	—	—	—	—	Withdrawn

Appendix C

The purpose of this investigation is to study different perceptions of facial expressions. Your responses are confidential. At no time will you be identified nor will anyone other than the investigators have access to your responses. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to terminate your participation at any time without penalty.

The scope of the project will be explained fully upon completion. Thank you for your cooperation.

I agree to participate in the present study being conducted under the supervision of a faculty member of the Psychology Department at Austin Peay State University. I have been informed, either orally or in writing or both, about the procedures to be followed and about any discomforts or risks which may be involved. The investigator has offered to answer any further inquiries as I may have regarding the procedures. I understand that I am free to terminate my participation at any time without penalty or prejudice and to have all data obtained from me withdrawn from the study and destroyed. I have also been told of any benefits that may result from my participation.

NAME (Please Print)

SIGNATURE

DATE