



Short Communication

Does your résumé photograph tell who you are?



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ABSTRACT

Given the importance of personality to predict consequential outcomes in the workplace, it is important to be able to measure it accurately. To date, no research has examined if people leave valid cues of their personality in résumé photographs. This research examined to what extent résumé photographs provide accurate information about the personality traits of their owner. Two observers rated 97 résumé photographs on four aspects: color photograph, photograph background, smile and professional attire. These ratings were compared with an accuracy criterion of the big five dimensions (self and peer reports). Results indicate that three out of the four cues are linked to extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness and emotional stability. These results suggest that résumé photographs can convey valid information about personality.

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1. Introduction

Given the importance of personality to predict consequential outcomes in the workplace (Barrick & Mount, 1991), it is important to be able to measure it accurately. Considering the fact that self-reports are prone to distortions in personnel selection settings, researchers aim at identifying alternative methods to measure personality (Morgeson et al., 2007). For this reason, studies have recently been published about the measurement of personality in selection interviews (Powell & Bourdage, 2016; Schmid Mast, Bangerter, Bulliard, & Aerni, 2011). In this study, we investigate if résumés (and more precisely résumé photographs) provide accurate information about the personality of their owner.

The résumé, or curriculum vitae, is regularly observed as one of the selection instruments that recruiters use the most often (König, Klehe, Berchtold, & Kleinmann, 2010; Zibarras & Woods, 2010). Despite its prevalence, studies about the predictive validity of résumés are scarce (Robertson & Smith, 2001). However, it seems that résumés contain cues that provide valid information about their owner's personality (Cole, Feild, Giles, & Harris, 2009). Cole et al. (2009) have for instance shown that the Grade Point Average is correlated positively with conscientiousness and that participation in extracurricular activities is linked positively with extraversion.

In many countries, the résumé is accompanied by a photograph of the applicant (Frauendorfer, Mast, & Sutter, 2015). Even in countries where this practice is unusual (e.g. the U.S.), recruiters have access to

applicants' photographs through social networking websites such as LinkedIn. Recently, Frauendorfer et al. (2015) have demonstrated that observers are able to detect to some extent the personality of strangers by merely examining their résumé photograph. It means then that résumé photographs contain cues that provide information about the personality of their owner.

There are many cues that appear in a résumé photograph (if the photograph is in color or black and white, if the person is smiling or not, if the person's attire is professional or sloppy, etc.). Some studies have already shown that people who smile in a photograph tend to score higher on the dimension of extraversion than people who do not smile (Meier, Robinson, Carter, & Hinsz, 2010; Naumann, Vazire, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2009). Another study has shown that professional attire is associated with higher scores in conscientiousness (Borkenau & Liebler, 1992). It is then very likely that these same cues are linked respectively to extraversion and conscientiousness in résumé photographs. The goal of the present study is to examine if résumé photographs convey accurate information about the personality of their owner, and which cues are predictive of personality.

2. Method

2.1. Procedure

Pairs of students in a hospitality management school were asked:

- To rate their own personality (self-report).
- To rate the personality of the other student (peer report).
- To send their résumé photograph by email.

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Once the photographs had been received, all the photographs were rated by two coders. To reduce the risk of order effects, the order in which the photographs were viewed was varied systematically.

2.2. Participants

A power analysis using G*Power 3.1.9.2 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) was performed. A sample size of 97 participants was required with the following parameters entered, $\rho = 0.25$ (this value has been chosen as previous studies have found correlations in the range of $r = 0.21$ to $r = 0.28$ between smile (or professional attire) and personality traits; e.g. Borkenau & Liebler, 1992; Naumann et al., 2009); 80% power and $\alpha = 0.05$. One hundred students in their final year of the bachelor program were approached by a researcher. However, the final sample consisted of 47 males and 50 females due to the fact that three participants did not provide their résumé photograph. The sample ranged from 18 to 30 years of age, with an average of 22.8 (SD = 1.68). 49.5% of the students knew each other for > 3 years and only 16.5% knew each other for 1 year or less. Moreover, 67% of the peer-ratings came from friends, 17.5% from classmates, 12.5% from coworkers, family members or romantic partners.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. IPIP big-five factor markers (Goldberg, 1992)

Each participant answered a self-report version of the 50-item instrument taken from the International Personality Item Pool. This instrument was used to measure the big five dimensions: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness to experience. Each trait was measured with 10 items on a Likert scale from 1 (very inaccurate) to 5 (very accurate). A peer-report version of the IPIP Big Five factor markers was also developed for the present study. The Cronbach alphas were 0.85, 0.82, 0.76, 0.79, and 0.81 for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience respectively for the self-report (and 0.85, 0.87, 0.81, 0.83, and 0.86 for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience respectively for the peer report). As studies have shown that self-ratings and other-ratings contribute significantly and independently to a person's personality, both perspectives are used in this study (Oh, Wang, & Mount, 2011; Vazire, 2010). In the present study, self-reports and peer-reports correlated significantly for the five traits (for extraversion, $r = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$; for agreeableness, $r = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$; for conscientiousness, $r = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$; for emotional stability, $r = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$; and for openness to experience, $r = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$). Self-reports and peer-reports were then averaged for each of the five personality traits as done previously in other studies of this kind (Gosling, Augustine, Vazire, Holtzman, & Gaddis, 2011).

2.3.2. Cues from résumé photographs

A coding scheme was developed to rate the résumé photographs. Four cues were chosen to rate the photographs: Color photograph (1 = Yes; 0 = No); Photograph background (1 = Neutral background (white or any single background color)); 0 = Not a neutral background (e.g. at home or outdoors); Smiling (1 = Not at all; 7 = A lot); Professional attire (1 = Not at all; 7 = A lot). The cues of smiling and professional attire were chosen because they were hypothesized to be correlated positively to extraversion and conscientiousness respectively. Photograph background was chosen because it was expected to relate positively to conscientiousness. As people scoring high in conscientiousness tend to be purposeful and goal-oriented, we thought that they would make effort in order to get a better quality résumé photograph than people scoring low in conscientiousness. Finally, color photograph was chosen because it was hypothesized that people scoring high on openness to experience would be more likely to use black and white photographs than people scoring low on this personality trait. The rationale was that black and white photographs are less common than color photographs and would be more likely to be used by more sophisticated and creative applicants. The two coders unanimously agreed on the cue of the color photograph and 92.8% agreement was found for the cue of the photograph background. After discussion, it was possible to reach agreement for 100% of the ratings regarding the photograph background. The item used to measure smiling was taken from Meier et al. (2010). The average rating was taken as the independent measure because the inter-rater reliability was more than satisfactory ($r = 0.96$, $p < 0.001$). For professional attire, the average rating was taken as the independent measure because the inter-rater reliability was satisfactory ($r = 0.70$, $p < 0.001$).

In the results section, bivariate correlations as well as partial correlations controlling for age and gender are reported between the five dimensions averaged between the self-report and the peer-report and the four cues. All the analyses were conducted using SPSS 22.

3. Results and discussion

As demonstrated in Table 1, 82% of the résumé photographs were in color and 72% had a neutral background (most often white, but sometimes blue or red). Males and females differed significantly on many variables. The females were more likely to pose in a neutral background and were more likely to smile than males. They scored higher on agreeableness and conscientiousness than males but they scored lower on extraversion and emotional stability. There was only one significant relationship between the four cues of résumé photographs. Participants who posed in a neutral background in the résumé photographs appeared to be more professionally dressed than participants who posed at home or outdoors.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and correlations.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	22.8	1.68	–										
2. Gender	0.49	0.50	0.19	–									
3. Color photograph	0.82	0.35	0.02	0.07	–								
4. Photograph background	0.72	0.45	–0.02	–0.23*	0.08	–							
5. Smiling	3.72	2.00	–0.18	–0.41**	0.02	0.13	–						
6. Professional attire	5.78	1.49	–0.02	0.05	0.03	0.41**	0.17	–					
7. Extraversion	3.64	0.58	–0.07	0.22*	–0.03	0.02	0.19	0.13	–				
8. Agreeableness	3.92	0.54	–0.01	–0.31**	–0.11	0.26**	0.28**	0.18	0.23*	–			
9. Conscientiousness	3.45	0.54	0.07	–0.41**	0.04	0.29**	0.07	0.01	–0.21*	0.32**	–		
10. Emotional stability	3.28	0.54	–0.24*	0.33**	–0.02	0.07	0.08	0.27**	0.43**	0.10	–0.10	–	
11. Openness to experience	3.75	0.50	0.15	–0.02	–0.05	0.04	–0.14	–0.02	0.31**	0.33**	0.12	0.23	–

Note: for gender: 1 = males, 0 = females; for color photograph: 1 = yes, 0 = no (black and white); for photograph background: 1 = neutral background, 0 = not a neutral background. For the five personality traits, scores range from 1 to 5.

* $p < 0.05$, two-tailed.

** $p < 0.01$, two-tailed.

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