

11

Personality and Dressing Style: Cues and Stereotypes

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Abstract

Research have shown that a relatively accurate judgement of some personality traits can be achieved even when judgements are based on very small amount of information, such as short videos or photographs. It has also been found that some cues leading to accurate judgment were related to characteristics of physical appearance such as dressing style. The aims of the present study were to examine to what extent personality is manifested in a dressing style, to what degree accurate personality judgment based solely on this type of information can be achieved, and what aspects of target persons' dressing style observers use in their judgments. Personality traits examined included the Big Five traits, affective traits, and narcissism. Group of 10 judges rated personalities of 74 target persons based on photographs of them in their favorite clothes, and the accuracy of those judgments was examined. Independent group of coders rated the level of presence of different dressing style cues, and the relationship of those cues with target persons' self-ratings and with judges' ratings was also examined. The achieved level of accuracy was quite low, but there were some valid cues to personality even in this type of context. Valid cues were not used by the judges, who used larger numbers of other cues instead. The results obtained indicate that, when they have small amount of information at their disposal, observers' judgments rely on stereotypes that have been found mostly inaccurate.

Keywords: first impressions, dressing style, personality perception, stereotypes

Are we what we wear, or relations between our personality and dressing style exist only in the eye of the beholder? Our physical appearance is in many cases the very first information available to others, including both face-to-face and on-line contexts, and our dressing style could drive initial perceptions of our personality, so the question is in what direction. The possibility of a relatively accurate personality perception has been found even when judgements were based on very small amount of information, like a short encounter (e.g. Beer and Watson, 2008), or even photograph (e.g. Borkenau, Brecke, Möttig, & Paelecke, 2009). Judgements can be based on different cues, and studies have found that some of these cues were related to characteristics such as facial expression or voice tone, and some of them were related to a dressing style (e.g. Borkenau & Liebler, 1992; Naumann, Vazire, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2009).

It has also been shown that personality can be expressed in personal spaces like offices and bedrooms, and Gosling and colleagues (Gosling, Gaddis, & Vazire 2008; Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli, & Morris, 2002) suggested three mechanisms through which this expression is possible. One of those mechanisms are identity claims that can be defined as symbolic statements intended to reinforce our own self-views, or statements directed to others about the way we would like to be regarded. Dressing style can be regarded as a source of identity claims, containing symbols reflecting someone's identity (Naumann et al., 2009). There is also evidence that personal possessions are linked to personality (e.g. Burroghs, Drews, & Hallman, 1991; Gillath, Bahns, Ge, & Crandall, 2012), but in previous research there was a great diversity in individual differences and possessions examined, and research in this domain relied mostly on self-reports about someone's possessions (Graham, Sandy, & Gosling, 2011). Taken together, these findings indicate that personality could be manifested in a dressing style, so the question is to what extent.

Manifestations of personality in physical appearance

The role of physical appearance in personality impressions can be examined within the *zero-acquaintance* paradigm, which indicates context in which participants are neither acquainted with target persons, nor have they ever interacted, so all judgments are based on target persons' physical and/or nonverbal characteristics (Albright, Kenny, & Malloy, 1988). Key feature of research conducted within this paradigm is the absence of interaction, and although the most typical approach encompasses judgments of persons who are physically present, it can also include videos or photographs (Kenny & West, 2008). When it comes to traits, a meta-analysis of accuracy of strangers' judgments of basic personality traits showed that even in this context some degree of accuracy can be achieved, and extraversion was perceived with the highest level of accuracy, followed by conscientiousness (Connelly & Ones, 2010). Although in all these contexts judgments were made by strangers, they differ by the amount of information and cues available to observers.

In the study by Albright et al. (1988) previously unacquainted participants rated each other's personality, and there was no any interaction between them. Conscientiousness was the most accurately judged trait, followed by extraversion. Albright et al. (1988) also examined relationship of few physical appearance variables with observers' judgments of personality, and primary basis for judgments of extraversion was the judgment of physical attractiveness, while primary basis for judgments of conscientiousness were formal and neat dress style.

In Borkenau and Liebler's (1992) classic study, target persons were videotaped entering a room, sitting behind a desk, reading a standard text, and leaving the room. Observer judgments were made in four conditions: video with sound, video without sound, still extracted from the video, or audio extracted from the video. In conditions with visual information present, extraversion was judged with the highest level of accuracy among the basic traits, followed by conscientiousness, and accuracy was lowest for emotional stability. Higher accuracy of judgments of extraversion and conscientiousness compared to other basic traits was replicated in later study (Borkenau & Liebler, 1993), and in the study where observers watched a

short video of different content (Carney, Colvin, & Hall, 2007). Another finding from Borkenau and Liebler's (1992) study was that when judgements were based on videotape cues that led to accurate judgement of extraversion were both visual, and acoustic. However, cues that led to accurate judgment of conscientiousness were almost entirely the visual ones (Borkenau & Liebler, 1992; 1995). This finding is in accordance with Albright et al. (1988) study, where there were no acoustic cues so conscientiousness was judged with higher accuracy than extraversion.

Contrary to these findings, in Beer and Watson's (2010) study, where judgments were based on photographs and videos, extraversion was judged with some degree of accuracy, while conscientiousness was not. In the study of Naumann et al. (2009), where judgements were based on the whole body photographs, there was also lack of accuracy in conscientiousness judgments, while extraversion was again most accurately judged basic personality trait. In a condition where participants were free to adopt a spontaneous pose and facial expression, there was also accuracy in openness judgements. In the research of Naumann et al. (2009) valid indicators for extraversion included both static and dynamic physical appearance cues, and the most valid static cues included healthy, stylish and neat appearance. When it comes to conscientiousness, the only valid static cue was undistinctive appearance, while neat appearance was to a smaller degree valid (and not significant) indicator of this trait. However, authors pointed out that the reason for observers not being able to judge conscientiousness correctly, as well as for lack of valid cues, possibly lies in restricted range of cues related to this trait since in their study student sample was used.

In all of the above mentioned research, videos and photos were taken by the researchers, and participants were not aware they will be filmed or photographed. In a research where judgments were based on target persons' self-portrait photographs (i.e. "selfies") most accurately judged basic personality trait was openness (Qiu, Lu, Yang, Qu, & Zhu, 2015). In a research design that employed five most recent selfies of target persons, conscientiousness was most accurately judged basic personality trait, followed by openness and extraversion (Kaurin, Heil, Wessa, Egloff, & Hirschmüller, 2018). Higher visibility of openness in photographs that allow more freedom of expression, as well as different backgrounds, is in accordance with the results of the study of Naumann et al. (2009).

Another trait that has received research attention is narcissism, since it was proposed that narcissists would be more likely to favour designer and expensive clothes in order to sustain and elevate their self-positivity (Sedikides, Gregg, Cisek, & Hart, 2007). It has been shown that narcissism is correlated with flashy and neat dress (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2010), and that this trait can be judged accurately based on whole body photos in standardized position. Valid cues of this trait included expensive and stylish clothes, an appearance that seemed to take a lot of preparation, attractiveness, as well as neat and organized appearance, and most of these cues were used by the observers in their judgements of this trait (Vazire, Naumann, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2008). Accurate judgement of this trait was also obtained when judgements were based on selfies (Kaurin et al., 2018).

In research where personality judgments were based on videos, observers had access to target persons' other physical characteristics, like movements or tone of the voice, while in research where judgments were based on photographs observers had access to information about facial characteristics and/or expression. Therefore, it was not entirely possible to determine to what extent is personality manifested in dressing style alone. Another related issue is which aspects of dressing style, in the absence of other information, observers use in their judgments of someone's personality.

Conceptual framework: Lens model

The links between personality traits and dressing style, and between dressing style and observers' perceptions of target persons personalities can be conceptualized in terms of lens model (e.g. Borkenau

& Liebler, 1992; Gosling et al., 2002; Nestler & Back, 2013). An example of the model is shown in Figure 1. Within this framework, dressing style characteristics i.e. cues can be considered lenses through which observer perceives, or judges someone's personality.

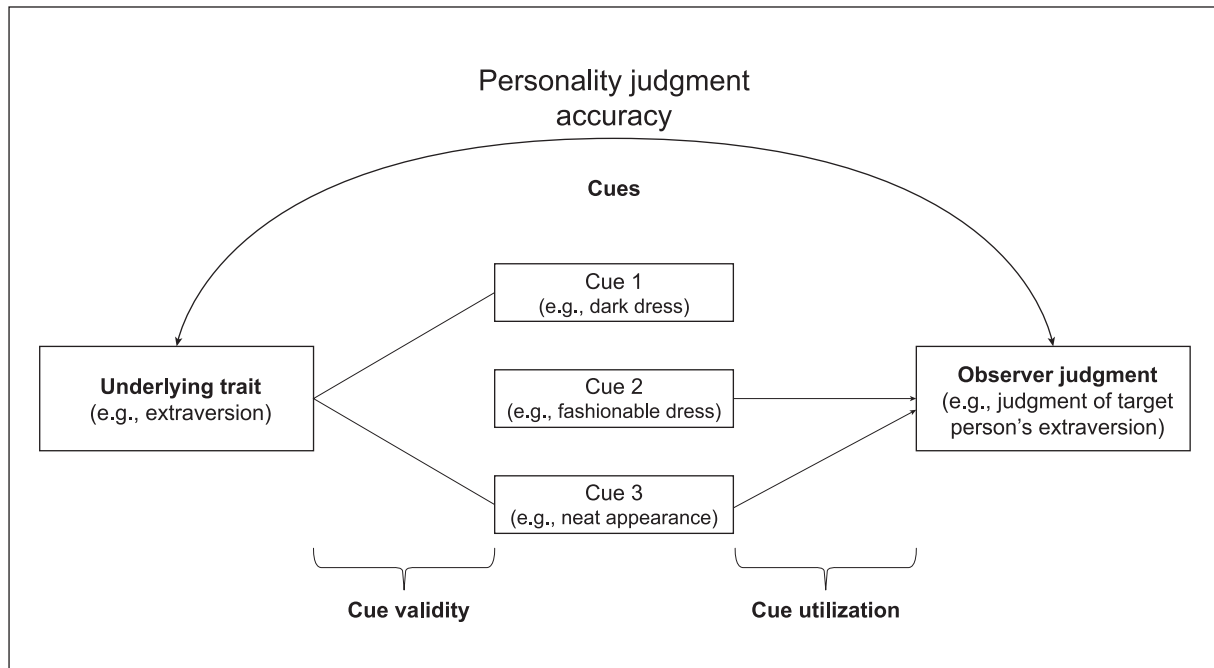


Figure 1 Lens model describing the process of personality judgment based on dressing style.

The extent to which an observable cue is a valid indicator of underlying personality trait is called *cue validity*. For example, fashionable dress may be a valid indicator of extraversion. The other side of the model is *cue utilization*, or the extent to which some observable cue is related to observer judgement of personality trait. For example, cue utilized by observers in their judgments of extraversion could include dark clothing, or neat appearance. Accuracy in underlying trait judgments is achieved when there are valid cues for that trait, and when those cues are utilized by the observer. So, if fashionable dress is a valid cue for extraversion, and observers utilize this cue in their judgments, this can result in accurate judgments of extraversion.

Current study

The aims of the current study were to examine whether it is possible to judge personality with some degree of accuracy based on the dressing style, to what extent personality is manifested in dressing style characteristics, and which dressing style characteristics are related to observers' judgements. We asked the participants to photograph themselves rather than standardize their positions because spontaneous position consists of more personality-relevant cues and leads to a greater accuracy in personality judgements (Naumann et al., 2009). In order to increase outfit variability, participants were asked to send us photos of their favourite outfit, and a group of judges rated their personalities based on those photographs. An independent group of coders rated the level of presence of various dressing style cues in order to examine the relationship of those cues with target persons' personalities, and with judges' ratings. The relationship between the level of presence of dressing style cues and target persons' self-ratings was treated as an indicator of cue validity, while the relationship between the level of presence of those cues and judges' ratings was treated as an indicator of cue utilization.

Although extraversion was most accurately judged in most of the described research, cues that led

to accurate judgment of this trait were less based on clothing compared to conscientiousness. In Borkenau and Liebler's (1995) study, accuracy of judgments of conscientiousness was almost entirely mediated by target persons' refinement of appearance, therefore we expected that this trait will be judged with the highest degree of accuracy of basic traits. Besides conscientiousness, some degree of accuracy was also expected for narcissism, since this trait is also manifested in different dressing styles. Although less examined than the basic personality traits in this type of research, affective traits were included in order to capture a broader range of traits, and it has been shown that these traits can also be judged accurately in a context with a small amount of available information (Carney et al., 2007). A study of Watson, Hubbard and Wiese (2000) included self- and other-ratings in samples of friends, dating couples, and married couples, and it has been found that the positive affect was highly correlated with extraversion, while neuroticism was highly correlated with negative affect in both self- and other-ratings (r 's > .50). However, both extraversion and neuroticism had higher self-other agreement correlations in all three samples of participants, indicating differences in visibility of these traits. In the study of Carney et al. (2007), where judgements were based on short video clips of strangers, extraversion was judged with a higher degree of accuracy compared to positive affect, while negative affect was judged with a higher degree of accuracy than neuroticism. Taken together, these findings could indicate that basic and affective traits are expressed via different cues, and/or that different cues are used in their judgements.

Method

Participants

Target participants (participants who sent photographs of themselves in their favorite outfit) were students of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, Croatia, and all students whose e-mail address was on the Faculty's IT department mailing list received an e-mail invitation to participate in a larger study. Total of 74 of them participated in this part of the research (11 male, age range: 18 – 44, $M = 22.8$, $SD = 4.13$). A sample of judges was consisted of ten participants, five of each gender (age range: 28 – 38, $M = 33.7$, $SD = 3.65$) who were not acquainted with target persons, nor they had ever been in contact. None of the judges has ever taken any psychology courses.

Measures

Big Five. Big Five dimensions were measured using Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003), where each dimension is measured with two pairs of traits. For each pair of traits, target participants were asked to rate to what extent it applies to them on a 7-point scale (1 = *disagree strongly* and 7 = *agree strongly*). Cronbach's alpha reliabilities for self-ratings were .67 for extraversion, .18 for agreeableness, .64 for conscientiousness, .55 for emotional stability, and almost zero for openness. Although reliabilities were low, especially for agreeableness and openness, it should be taken into account that that questionnaire emphasized content validity considerations in order to capture breadth of the traits, and since only two items per trait were used, a higher reliability would indicate high content overlap (Gosling et al., 2003). Reliabilities of aggregated judges' ratings (i.e. averaged across judges and items) were .70 for extraversion, .51 for agreeableness, .53 for conscientiousness, .58 for emotional stability, and .66 for openness.

Affective traits. Affective traits were measured using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS – Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), with ten items for each affect. For each item, participants were asked to rate how often they generally feel that way on a 5-point scale (0 = *slightly or not at all* and 4 = *all*

the time). Example items include “interested” or “determined” for positive affect, and “upset” or “nervous” for negative affect. Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities for negative and positive affect were .86 and .83 for self-ratings, and .88 and .90 for aggregated judges’ ratings, respectively.

Narcissism. Narcissism was measured using subscale of Short Dark Triad (SD3; Jones & Paulhus, 2014), consisted of nine items. Participants were asked to indicate agreement with each item on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample items include “Many group activities tend to be dull without me” or “I have been compared to famous people”. Alpha reliability for self-ratings was .66, and .92 for aggregated judges’ ratings.

Cues

Potential dressing style correlates of target persons’ personalities, or those of observers’ judgments were selected based on previous research (e.g. Borkenau & Liebler, 1995; Beer & Watson, 2010; Vazire et al., 2008) and upon the examination of photographs. A total of 26 cues was selected, with 12 of them pertaining to overall impression (e.g. attractive, distinctive appearance), and 14 of them pertaining to clothing (e.g. dark, refined). Three independent coders rated dressing style cues on a 7-point bipolar scales. None of the coders knew any of the target participants. One cue (relaxed stance) was removed from the analysis due to a low reliability (Cronbach $\alpha = .18$), while reliabilities for other cues ranged from .55 to .92.

Procedure

All data collection was carried out online. For target persons, the invitation to participate was sent via e-mail by Faculty’s IT department to all students of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. Invitation contained short description of the research, and link to an online platform where participants filled out the questionnaires. After participants completed all the questionnaires, they were asked to upload photograph of themselves in their favorite outfit where the whole outfit was visible. They were also told that their head should not be visible, and if it was visible, it was removed from the photograph. Personality judgments were also carried out online, and each judge received a link to a set of targets persons to judge. Each judge rated 29 or 30 target persons, and each target person was rated by four judges (two of them female, and two of them male).

Results

The accuracy was defined as single judge and average judge accuracy. Single judge accuracy is average Pearson correlation between target persons’ self-ratings and each of judges’ ratings, where judge-level correlations were firstly transformed into *z*-values using the Fisher *r*-to-*z* transformation, averaged and then re-transformed into correlation coefficients. Average judge accuracy is Pearson correlation coefficient between target persons’ self-ratings and judges’ ratings averaged across judges and items. Accuracy correlations are shown in Table 1. At single judge level, none of the traits was judged accurately, while at the aggregated judge level accuracy for conscientiousness was marginally statistically significant.

Table 1 Accuracy of Personality Judgments

Personality trait	Single judge	Average judge
Extraversion	.12	.12
Agreeableness	.06	.04
Conscientiousness	.11	.20†
Emotional stability	.08	.11

Openness	.12	.08
Negative affect	.05	-.01
Positive affect	-.02	-.04
Narcissism	.11	.10

Note. Single judge accuracy is the average of 10 Pearson correlations between self-reports and judges' ratings calculated with Fisher r-to-z transformation; average judge accuracy is Pearson correlation between average of judges' ratings and the target person's self-report; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. † $p < .10$.

Cue validity and cue utilization in judgments of Big Five personality traits are shown in Table 2. Colourful clothes were a valid indicator for the largest number of traits, including extraversion, conscientiousness, and emotional stability. Conscientiousness and emotional stability each had two valid cues, while none of the examined cues was a valid indicator of openness. The largest number of cues was utilized in judgements of extraversion, while the smallest number of them was utilized in judgments of emotional stability and openness. None of the valid cues was utilized by the judges.

Table 2 *Big Five Traits Cue Validity and Cue Utilization*

Cue validity correlations					Cue	Cue utilization correlations				
E	A	C	ES	O		E	A	C	ES	O
-.02	.05	-.19	-.05	.03	Attractive	.31**	-.12	.25*	.15	.12
.02	.07	.04	.13	-.05	Stout physique	-.19	-.08	-.05	-.02	-.45**
.04	-.02	-.15	.10	.06	Muscular physique	.35**	-.34**	.02	.09	-.20
-.01	-.01	-.17	.05	.09	Proportioned body	.31**	-.09	.15	.20	.05
.23†	-.05	-.14	.02	.02	Self-assured stance	.60**	-.41**	.03	.11	.08
.16	.10	.03	.00	.05	Energetic stance	.64**	-.24*	.21	.29*	.12
-.01	-.12	-.14	-.16	-.09	A lot of effort	.30**	-.21†	.34**	-.02	.00
-.15	.11	.06	.04	.05	Neat appearance	.07	.04	.35**	.23†	-.11
.15	-.19	-.17	-.14	.13	Distinctive appearance	.33**	-.21†	-.03	-.13	.23†
.10	.06	.11	.19	.05	Mature dressing style	-.11	-.12	.10	.07	-.36**
-.11	-.07	-.19	-.14	-.16	Dark clothing	.05	-.12	-.19	-.30*	.04
.28*	.04	.28*	.26*	.19	Colourful clothing	-.08	.27*	.03	.24*	.01
.14	-.20	-.25*	-.15	.04	Showy clothing	.36**	-.26*	-.04	-.10	.15
.03	.01	-.04	.04	.03	Formal clothing	.27*	-.30**	.29*	.07	-.11
-.09	-.14	-.20†	-.26*	-.06	Fashionable clothing	.28*	-.04	-.12	-.13	.43**
.02	.07	-.01	.01	.03	Refined clothing	.35**	-.18	.39**	.14	.04
-.02	.09	-.11	-.01	.05	Elegant clothing	.31**	-.18	.31**	.12	-.03
.10	.00	-.07	.00	.02	Dressy	.32**	-.32**	.24*	.03	-.07
-.19	.11	.09	.06	.10	Casual	-.24*	.43**	-.12	.06	.21

-.02	.12	-.08	-.09	-.02	Seems expensive	.28*	-.21†	.33**	.17	-.04
-.17	.04	.17	.10	.15	Seems comfortable	-.17	.46**	.01	.27*	.26*
.05	.03	-.22†	-.07	.00	Revealing	.44**	-.30**	.12	.01	.05
.06	-.28*	-.14	-.09	-.07	Subcultural	.07	.04	-.16	-.28*	.42**
.13	-.04	-.06	-.05	-.18	Accessories	.29*	-.15	.17	.06	.11

Note. Correlations are Pearson correlation coefficients between the level of presence of each cue and target persons' self-ratings (cue validity) and between the level of presence of each cue and judges ratings (cue utilization). E = extraversion; A = agreeableness; C = conscientiousness; ES = emotional stability; O = openness.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. † $p < .10$.

When it comes to affective traits, again none of the valid cues was utilized by the judges (Table 3). Colourful clothes were a valid indicator of positive affect, while there was the opposite relation of this cue with negative affect. Clothing that seems comfortable was also a valid indicator of positive affect. As it was the case with the Big Five traits, there was more utilized than valid cues for both traits. Interesting to note, more cues were utilized in judgments of positive than negative affect.

Table 3 *Affective Traits Cue Validity and Cue Utilization*

Cue validity correlations		Cue	Cue utilization correlations	
NA	PA		NA	PA
.05	-.09	Attractive	-.21†	.33**
-.13	.05	Stout physique	.27*	-.09
-.10	.07	Muscular physique	-.25*	.19
-.10	.02	Proportioned body	-.41**	.23*
.03	.14	Self-assured stance	-.36**	.32**
.07	.06	Energetic stance	-.61**	.36**
.09	-.19	A lot of effort	-.11	.38**
.15	.04	Distinctive appearance	-.13	.24*
-.28*	.27*	Colourful	-.06	.13
.10	-.03	Showy	-.17	.34**
-.04	-.10	Formal	-.07	.21†
.19	.04	Fashionable	-.23†	.25*
-.06	-.10	Refined	-.21†	.33**
.00	-.13	Elegant	-.20	.33**
-.06	-.14	Dressy	-.15	.26*
-.02	-.07	Seems expensive	-.18	.40**

.07	.25*	Seems comfortable	-.21	-.07
.02	-.13	Revealing	-.21	.37**
.12	-.04	Accessories	-.06	.43**

Note. Note. Correlations are Pearson correlation coefficients between the level of presence of each cue and target persons' self-ratings (cue validity) and between the level of presence of each cue and judges ratings (cue utilization). NA = negative affect; PA = positive affect.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. † $p < .10$.

One final trait that was examined was narcissism. Contrary to expectations, none of the examined cues was valid indicator of this trait (Table 4). However, there was a number of utilized cues. For example, participants in reveling clothes, clothes that seemed expensive or elegant were judged as narcissists.

Table 4 *Narcissism Cue Validity and Cue Utilization*

Cue validity correlations	Cue	Cue utilization correlations
.10	Attractive	.43**
.04	Muscular physique	.53**
.13	Proportioned body	.42**
.17	Self-assured stance	.61**
.05	Energetic stance	.55**
.07	A lot of effort	.53**
.01	Neat appearance	.27*
.09	Distinctive appearance	.36**
-.02	Showy	.42**
.17	Formal	.47**
.19	Refined	.52**
.09	Elegant	.51**
.09	Dressy	.51**
-.16	Casual	-.43**
.17	Seems expensive	.52**
-.04	Seems comfortable	-.32**
.00	Revealing	.57**
.18	Accessories	.39**

Note. Correlations are Pearson correlation coefficients between the level of presence of each cue and target persons' self-ratings (cue validity) and between the level of presence of each cue and judges ratings (cue utilization). * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. † $p < .10$.

Discussion

This study was conducted in order to examine how personality is manifested in dressing style, to what extent accurate personality judgment based solely on this type of information can be achieved, and what aspects of dressing style are used when observers try to infer someone's personality based on dressing style. Although the achieved level of accuracy was quite low, there were some valid indicators of personality even in this type of context. Those indicators were not used by the judges, but a larger number of indicators used instead was identified.

Accuracy correlations from this study were lower compared to those from other studies in which the whole body photographs, including face, were present (e.g. Naumann et al., 2009). This is especially true for judgements of extraversion, which has been identified as the most visible Big Five trait in research where judgments were made by strangers (Connelly & Ones, 2010). At one hand, it should be noted that Big Five traits were measured with a short instrument in order to decrease the judges' burden, but as a consequence those traits were measured with a lower level of reliability which could have resulted with lower correlations. On the other hand, lack of accuracy in judgments of this trait could indicate that face cues carry some additional information on this trait that could be needed to correctly infer to what extent is someone extraverted. This is in accordance with the finding that extraversion can be judged relatively accurately even on the basis of the photograph of someone's face (Borkenau et al., 2009).

Some degree of accuracy was achieved in judgments of conscientiousness, giving tentative support to the notion that accuracy in judging this trait is to a large extent based on dressing style (Borkenau & Liebler, 1995). However, correlation was low and only marginally statistically significant, and none of the examined cues were both a valid indicator of this trait and at the same time utilized by the judges, although it is possible that judges utilized some valid cues that we did not measure. Valid cues to this trait that were identified in previous research included, for example, refined appearance, as well as formal dress (Borkenau & Liebler, 1992; 1995). Although the validity of these cues was not confirmed in this research, observers utilized them in their judgments. It was also expected that a dressing style will contain at least some of the cues valid to narcissism, like neat appearance, or expensive clothes (Back et al., 2010; Vazire et al., 2008) which was not confirmed. As in the case of conscientiousness, those cues were utilized by the judges.

In most previous research participants were not aware that they will be videoed or photographed, which leads to a question whether our participants altered their usual appearance in order to achieve a particular impression. For example, it has been found that it is possible to control the impressions of some personality traits in photographs using only different poses (Leikas, Verkasalo, & Lönnqvist, 2013). It has also been found that satisfaction with outfit is positively related to well-being and happiness, so when people are satisfied with the way they dressed, or when someone compliments the way they dressed they feel better about themselves (Nezlek, Mochort, & Cypryńska, 2018). Since our participants were aware someone will see their photographs, it is possible that they sent photographs of clothing they do not usually wear, which could have led to the lack of valid cues. However, this assumption should be tested in a controlled setting.

Although the number of valid cues to traits examined was small, the opposite was true for the number of cues observers utilized in their judgments, and this is the most consistent finding across all examined traits. Kenny's (2004) theoretical model named PERSON predicts that categorical information, or what was usually meant by stereotypes tends to dominate initial impressions, and their share in impressions declines as the acquaintance increases. In other words, when observers have little information on target persons, their impressions are to a large extent based on stereotypes. As the available information about target persons increases, stereotypes are given less weight in overall impressions. This prediction was confirmed empirically, as well as the prediction that stereotypes impair initial judgments only if they do not contain a kernel of truth. If stereotypes contain a kernel of truth, they can improve the accuracy of first impressions

(Holleran, Mehl, & Levitt, 2009). When applied to our research setting, this could mean that a dressing style holds a very small amount of information about someone, so in the absence of available cues observers relied on stereotypes in their judgments. Cues that they utilized in their judgments were not valid indicators of personality traits judged, meaning their stereotypes did not contain a kernel of truth, so their judgments were not accurate.

When considering the results of the present study, it should be taken into account that our sample of target persons was rather small, and predominately female. For this reason analyses could not be performed separately for each gender although there could be differences in accuracy of personality judgments of male and female target participants (e.g. Naumann et al., 2009). Due to a relatively small sample, it is also possible that we did not have enough statistical power to detect accuracy correlations that exist at the population level, especially if we take into consideration that basic personality traits were measured using a short instrument, and consequently with lower reliability. A short instrument was chosen in order to decrease judges' burden, but it has certain limitations, which are demonstrated in the Croatian validation of the instrument used in this study (Tatalović Vorkapić, 2016). Low reliability could be a result of the short instrument used, particular sample, or the need for adaptation of some items. Although our participants were free to choose the outfit on which judgments were based, it is possible that cue expression was restricted in range since they were all students who study at the same faculty. Similar educational interests, and especially age restriction, could have decreased variability in dressing style since younger people probably dress more similar to each other compared to older people.

Nevertheless, the results of the present study imply that individuals may choose to alter their dressing style in order to convey a particular impression, but this hypothesis should be tested in a controlled setting. Another implication pertains to inaccurate stereotypes based on dressing style, which can have real-life consequences for the person being judged. Further research should therefore test if these stereotypes resulted from the lack of available information, or they are a part of some implicit personality theory. For example, Beer and Watson (2010) showed that provision of only one trait-implying sentence can increase accuracy not only for the trait in question, but also for other judged traits. In a context where personality judgments were based on physical appearance, an information about the target person's face may not only increase personality perception accuracy, but can also reduce stereotypes resulting from a small number of available cues.

Conclusions

The question that this research has tried to answer was whether we are what we wear, or whether the relations between our personality and dressing style exist only in the eye of the beholder. The accuracy of personality judgments based on dressing style was low, but there were some valid cues to personality even in this type of context. However, different set of cues were utilized by the judges. This indicates that the observers' judgments rely on stereotypes that are mostly inaccurate when they have a small amount of information at their disposal. Therefore, according to our findings, we are what we wear only to a small degree, and there are some illusory stereotypes in the eye of the beholder, at least when the amount of available information is limited only to dressing style.

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