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Kelsey O'Brien
Colby College

Amy Reynolds
Colby College

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The Influence of Gender and Facial Appearance on Voting Practices



Kelsey O'Brien, Amy Reynolds, Hanna Schenk
Colby College



Introduction

People make character judgments rapidly, based upon nothing more than facial appearance. In examining these judgments, it becomes evident that a distinction exists between mature and immature facial features, such that those with mature faces are often perceived to be more competent and intelligent than those with immature faces. In addition, perceptions of competence prove to be highly influential to the voter. This delineation between facial features has interesting implications, particularly with regards to gender.

Women's faces tend to naturally retain more neonate features than men. These features, such as a greater eye height, a smaller nose area, and a wider smile, would cause women to have more immature faces than males. Interestingly, women who have these facial features are often perceived as more attractive than women with mature facial features. These findings imply that women would be judged less competent than men, and that immature-faced women would be perceived as less competent and more attractive than mature-faced females. Given the direction of political leadership in our country, this has interesting implications for females that are vying for leadership positions.

Thus, our study examined the effects of both candidate gender and facial features on voting likelihood, and perceptions of attractiveness and competence, by pairing pictures with neutral party platforms.

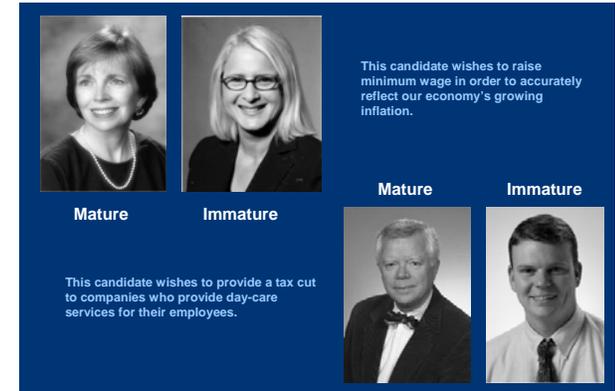
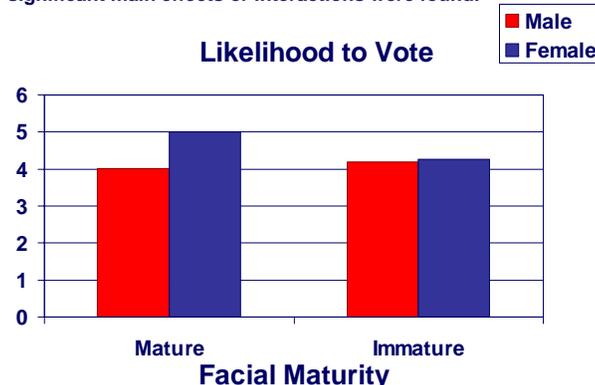
Methods

Four booklets were created, two with female mature and immature candidates and two with male mature and immature candidates. Within each candidate gender, the two booklets had the same twelve candidates randomized. Twelve neutral political platforms were randomly paired with each candidate. Candidate faces and political platforms were prescreened for maturity and neutrality.

Participants were randomly assigned to a booklet and asked to rate their likelihood of voting for each candidate on a seven point scale (where 1 is "definitely not vote" and 7 is "definitely vote"). After finishing, participants rated each candidate for attractiveness and competence, also on a seven point scale (1 is "very unattractive" or "very incompetent" and 7 is "very attractive" or "very competent").

Results

To examine the effects of facial maturity and candidate gender on voting likelihood, attractiveness, and competency three 2 (face: mature, immature) x 2 (candidate gender: male vs. female) between subjects mixed design ANOVAs were used. The analyses revealed a main effect for facial maturity, $F(1,58) = 8.50, p < .01$, and a facial maturity by candidate sex interaction, $F(1,58) = 20.08, p < .01$. In addition, a main effect for competence was found, $F(1, 58) = 29.21, p < .01$. No other significant main effects or interactions were found.



Sample Stimuli

Conclusions

The interaction between facial maturity and candidate gender indicates that facial maturity is only salient for female candidates. Females with mature facial features were significantly more likely to be voted for than females with immature faces. This did not hold true for male candidates, who were voted for regardless of their facial maturity.

A significant difference was also found between facial maturity and ratings of competence such that mature faces were given higher competence ratings than immature faces. This suggests that both males and females with mature facial features are perceived to be more competent than their immature counterparts.

Other results were found to be non-significant, indicating that attractiveness did not play a significant role in voter decisions. Our results suggest that women, particularly those with immature faces, may be at a disadvantage when running for a political office due to voter perceptions of competency.

Contact Information: Kelsey O'Brien, kobrien@colby.edu
Amy Reynolds, amreynol@colby.edu
Hanna Schenk, hlschenk@colby.edu