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The Impact of Compliments

By: Olivia Bazzell, Kellie Brown, and Jonas Kalchner

Introduction

- Not many studies examine the impact of the prosocial behavior of giving and receiving compliments, or examine the differences between personality and appearance-based compliments (Boothby & Bohns, 2021)
- Compliments improve mood and are effective in achieving compliance (Kahalon, R., Shnabel, N., & Becker, J. C., 2018; Grant, Krieger, Nemirov, Fabrigar, & Norris, 2021)
- Hearing positive comments about appearance from a significant other predicted greater relationship satisfaction, especially for women (Carriere and Kluck, 2014)
- Compliments about physical appearance can interfere with cognitive performance (Kahalon, Shnabel, & Becker, 2018)
- Personality-targeted praise was rated higher than appearance-targeted praise, and criticisms based on personality were rated as more unpleasant than criticisms about appearance (Gao, Luo, Zhang, Lan, Gou, & Li, 2019)

Hypothesis

Participants will rate personality compliments as having a greater positive impact than compliments on physical appearance.

Method

PARTICIPANTS

- Age- 18-22 ($M = 19.02$)
- Race- 68.97% white, 20.69% black, 8.62% multiple/mixed races, 1.72% middle eastern
- Biological Sex- 49 females, 8 males, 1 other

MATERIALS

- Consent Form
- Scenario Sheet with 7 point Likert Scale
- Demographics Sheet
- Manipulation Check Sheet

PROCEDURE

- Participants were randomly assigned into receiving an imagined scenario with a compliment about personality or a physical characteristic (see to the right)
- Participants indicated how they felt as a result of the scenario on a 7 Point Likert Scale (How happy, good, pleased, and flattered)
- Participants then filled out the demographics section indicating their age, gender, and ethnicity
- Lastly, participants were instructed to fill out a manipulation check and were then debriefed at the conclusion of the study

Scenario 1

Read the scenario and answer the questions using the scales provided.

Imagine someone (who's the same gender as you) notices something they really like about you. This person approaches you and gives you a genuine, straight-forward compliment about a **personality characteristic** (e.g., "I really like your sense of humor").

Scenario 2

Read the scenario and answer the questions using the scales provided.

Imagine someone (who's the same gender as you) notices something they really like about you. This person approaches you and gives you a genuine, straight-forward compliment about a **physical characteristic** (e.g., "I really like your shirt").

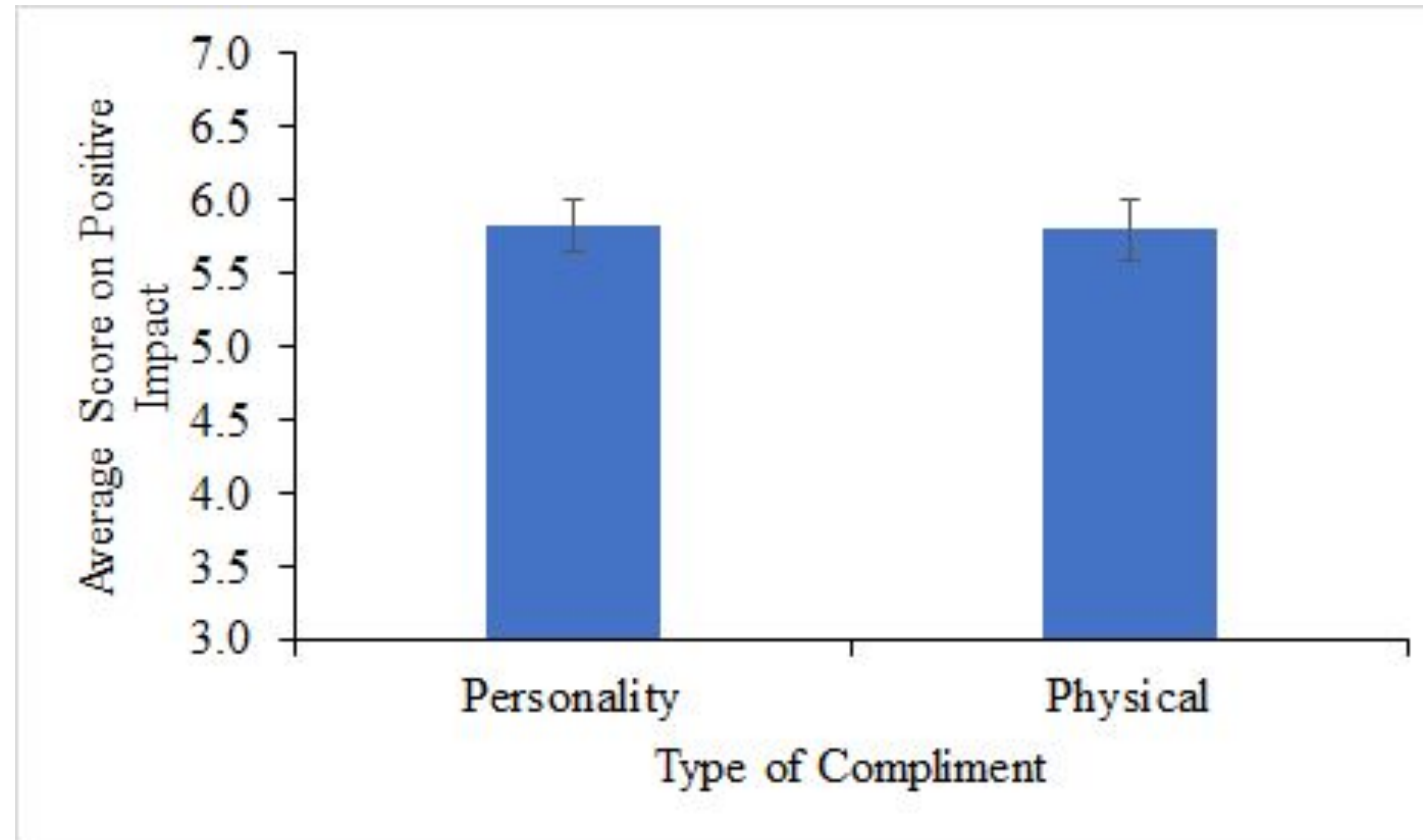


Figure 1. This figure demonstrates the differences in means of average positive impact for both levels of the independent variable.

Results

- An independent sample t-test was conducted to analyze our data; $t(45) = 0.122$, $p = 0.548$, *Cohen's d* = 0.032.
- The analysis revealed that there is no significant difference between participants who received a compliment based on personality or physical characteristics.

Discussion

- The data did not support our hypothesis that participants will rate personality compliments as having a greater positive impact than compliments on physical appearance.
- Compliments on physical appearance may be more meaningful than they appear because they represent people's personal choices, identify and culture (Boothby & Bohns, 2021)

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Explore how differences in personality affect the way people perceive both appearance and personality compliments (Swift, V., & Peterson, J. B., 2018)
- Explore how people perceive compliments from those who are dissimilar to them in age and gender (Howell, J. L., Sweeny, K., Miller, W., & Shepperd, J. A., 2019)

LIMITATIONS

- Participants might have found it difficult to imagine receiving a personality compliment, many failed the manipulation check (19% of participants)
- The impact of an imagined compliment is likely different than an actual face-to-face compliment

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