

## Self-Fulfilling Prophecies and Stereotypes

Mark Snyder (1977) creates a study that does just this—permitting us to see how the physical attractiveness of a female can lead men to treat her differently; leading her, in turn, to act in a manner consistent with that stereotype.

Mark Snyder expected that the physical attractiveness of a person influences the perception of them by others and the way others treat them. Specifically, he expected that attractive women would be perceived and treated more favorably by men. To test this, Snyder (1977) had fifty-one male and fifty-one female undergraduate students at the University of Minnesota interact with one another in male-female dyads in which they could not see one another but could talk via telephone. The photographs were not actually of the females with whom they were interacting, but instead were photographs of either a physically attractive or physically unattractive female one of which was randomly assigned to each dyad. This effectively created two groups, one with a woman the man perceived as attractive and the other with a woman the man did not perceive as attractive. At that point, before any interaction took place, each male was asked to provide his first impressions of the female (based on the picture only) on a number of characteristics. Each dyad then engaged in ten-minute unstructured conversation in which the statements by the male and female were recorded on separate channels of an audio tape so that they could be analyzed separately later.

Then twelve raters were asked to rate the females on the same personality characteristics by listening to just her side of the taped conversation. Finally, nine raters were asked to rate the males on the same personality characteristics by listening to just his side of the taped conversation. The consistency of the raters with one another in their ratings of the same males or females was assessed and found to be highly reliable. The raters did not know the hypotheses of the study and did not know whether the female had been assigned to the “attractive” or “unattractive” condition. Snyder found that the men formed their initial stereotypes of the females based on general stereotypes associating physical attractiveness with socially desirable personality characteristics. Females in the “attractive photo” condition were perceived to be more cordial, poised, socially adept, and humorous, while those in the “unattractive photo” condition were perceived to be more awkward, serious, withdrawn, and socially inept. The men also treated the women differently. The judges perceived men in the “attractive photo condition” to be more cordial, sexually warm, bold, outgoing, humorous, sexually permissive, and socially adept than those in the “unattractive photo” condition. Finally, the changed behavior of the men led the women to behave in ways that conformed to the men’s stereotype of them. Women in the “attractive photo” condition (who did not know in which condition they were) were perceived by the judges to be more friendly, likable, and social. In short, those women tended to act in the manner expected by the men.

This study by Snyder dramatically illustrates how our stereotypes of people, even when based on something as flimsy as a first impression from a photograph, can change our behavior towards those people enough that it leads those people to act in ways we expect from our stereotype.