The Dumb Blonde Effect: How Stereotypes and Needlessly Complex Words are Associated

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Introduction
This study replicated Bry, Follenfant, & Meyer’s (2008) “Blonde Like Me”, and Oppenheimer’s (2008) “The secret life of fluency”. Individuals exposed to images of blonde-haired women associated with the “dumb blonde” stereotype and performed poorly on cognitive tasks (Bry, et. al. 2008). Oppenheimer’s study demonstrated that participants found authors who use a more complex vocabulary appear less intelligent than authors of simple essays due to disrupted fluency (Oppenheimer, 2008).

This two factor study determined if the “dumb blonde” stereotype also influenced judgments of author intelligence.

Hypotheses
1) Exposure to the blonde-haired women would cause participants to have greater difficulty in reading the essays.
2) Participants would find the authors of an essay with overly complex vocabulary less intelligent than the authors of the simple essay.
3) Participants would experience an interactive effect of the two independent variables.

Method

Informed Consent
Demographics
Primming

Simple Essay
Complex Essay
Simple Essay
Complex Essay

Reactions and Comments
Debriefing

Results
We found there to be no main effect of participants in the blonde condition rating the essay as more difficult than those in the control condition. These findings are not comparable to Bry et al., (2008) study in which they found that participants associated with the blonde condition causing them to perform worse on a cognitive task.

We found there to be no statistically significant effect of participants in the complex essay scenario when rating the essay’s author as less intelligent than participants in the control scenario did. These results were not comparable to the Oppenheimer (2008) study in which he determined that participants perceive the authors of the more complex essays as less intelligent due to disrupted fluency in the essay.

We had 27% of participants leave a comment about the perceived author intelligence. Most participants commented on the poor grammar in the essay and how that affected their judgments.

Discussion
This study determined how two separate independent variables affected cognition.

Our results did not replicate the Bry, et. al. (2008) study as intended. Participants in the blonde and non-blonde condition rated essays equally as difficult.

Our results did not replicate Oppenheimer’s (2008) study either. Participants did not find the author of the more complex essay less intelligent than the author of the simple essay.

Participants comments revealed that many believed the author of the complex essay to be less intelligent than the author of the simple essay.

Limitations
We believe that there was no effect for either independent variable due to participants not associating with the “dumb blonde” stereotype.

We also believe that since our essays were not grammatically correct many participants judged them based off of their incorrect grammar rather than their content.

References


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