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Face-ism in Photographs: Sex and Status Differences

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ABSTRACT

The tendency to depict men with greater facial prominence than women was examined in a series of four exploratory studies. A significant sex difference in face-ism was found in the photographs of members of a professional advertising association (n=682), of Hispanics identified as influential in the United States (n=100), and of U.S. Governors and Lieutenant Governors (n=98). No sex difference in face-ism was found in the photographs of authors of recent issues of the Journal of Advertising Research (n=40). A post hoc analysis of the politicians' photographs also showed that Governors were shown with greater facial prominence than were Lieutenant Governors. The socio-consumer behavior implications of the effects of face-ism are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

A person's face can innocently, or with intent, stimulate from outside observers a myriad of perceptions and attributions about his or her emotions, capabilities, attractiveness, status, and power (cf. Wallbott 1991). The impact of the face on such nonverbal communication becomes ever so more immediate when that face resides in a still photograph rather than on a person in the flesh in toto.

Moreover, it has been suggested that there may be sex differences in the ways in which faces are depicted in photographs and that these differences may somehow reinforce stereotypical perceptions of males and females (Adams et al 1980; Archer et al 1983; Copeland 1989). Differences in sex role portrayals in magazine advertisements (e.g., Courtney & Lockeretz 1971) and television commercials (e.g., Sharits & Lammers 1983) have not been lost on consumer behavior researchers. Consequently, the implications of sex differences in photographic depictions may be of more than that of passing theoretical importance to consumer behaviorists. Indeed, this is a point repeatedly stressed by Archer et al (1983).

The specific sex difference suggested by Archer et al (1983) concerns the phenomenon they coined face-ism. Face-ism is "the relative prominence of the face in a photograph, drawing, or other depiction of a person" (Archer et al 1983, p. 726). Archer et al (1983) reported a series of studies showing that face-ism was significantly greater for men than for women portrayed in such consumer publications as Time, Newsweek, Ms, The San Francisco Chronicle, Paris Match, Der Spiegel, The Santa Cruz Sentinel, and others). These findings, along with additional face-ism effects in centuries of artwork, led Archer et al to the understatement that there was a prevailing "tendency to represent men by their faces and women by their bodies" (p. 728).

In the present paper, we conducted a series of four exploratory "mini" studies in which the purpose was quite simple and straightforward; namely, to extend the search for sex differences in face-ism to groups of persons who are likely to be more homogeneous in their professional careers or influential status than the men and women in the consumer publications examined by Archer et al (1983). Sex differences in face-ism may be less probable when there is reduced diversity in the professions and status of the photographed individuals. To still observe significant sex differences in face-ism within such groups would only serve to enhance the theoretical importance of face-ism.

METHOD AND RESULTS

In each of the following four studies, published photographs of individuals were scored for face-ism by using Archer et al's (1983, p. 726) method for computing a face-ism index; namely, the distance from the top of the head to the bottom of the chin was divided by the distance from the top of the head to the lowest visible part of the body.

Study 1: Professionals in Advertising

In this study, we examined the photographs of the members of the Advertising Club of Los Angeles (ACLA). ACLA was founded in 1912 and is an association of advertising professionals in Southern California. Of the 682 photographs of members published in the 1990-1991 Official Membership Directory of the ACLA, 416 were of males and 266 were of females.

We found that the advertising professionals were not immune to sex differences in the face-ism effect. Specifically, the face-ism index was significantly greater for males (M=.7295, sd=.1118) than for females [M=.6900, sd=.0965, $F(1, 680)$=22.45, p<.0001; see Figure 1].

Study 2: Top 100 Hispanic Influentials

In Study 2, we examined the photographs of Hispanics portrayed in the October, 1991 issue of the American periodical Hispanic Business as the "100 Hispanic Influentials in the United States." Although the professions of these individuals ranged widely, their status, as perceived by the magazine editors, was high. Of the 100 influentials, 77 were males and 23 were females. Once again, the sex difference in face-ism was significant. For males the mean face-ism index was .7754, sd=.049; whereas, for females the mean face-ism index was .7455, sd=.065, $F(1, 98)$=5.60, p=.020; see Figure 2.

Study 3: U.S. Governors and Lieutenant Governors

In Study 3, we examined the photographs of current U.S. State Governors and Lieutenant Governors published in Taylor's Encyclopedia of Government Officials: Federal and State, Volume XIII (Clements 1991). Photographs were not published for two of the 50 lieutenant governors. Of the remaining 98 governors and lieutenant governors, 88 were males and 10 were females. Male governors and lieutenant governors (M=.8554, sd=.0702) had a higher face-ism index than female governors and lieutenant governors [M=.8088, sd=.0827, $F(1, 96)$=3.83, p=.053; see Figure 3.]

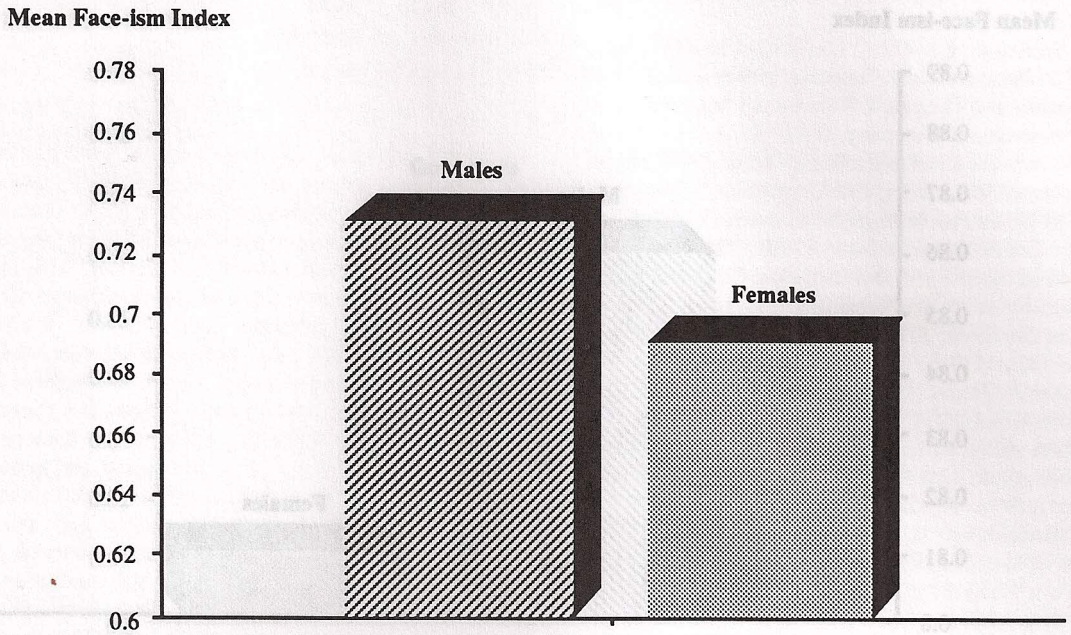
Study 4: Authors of Articles in the Journal of Advertising Research

In Study 4, we examined the photographs of authors of articles published in the four most recent issues of the Journal of Advertising Research, 31 (1-4), 1991. Of the forty published photographs, 7 were of female authors and 33 were of male authors. No significant sex difference on the face-ism index was found, grand M=.7899, sd=.1209, $F(1, 38)$<1.00.

DISCUSSION

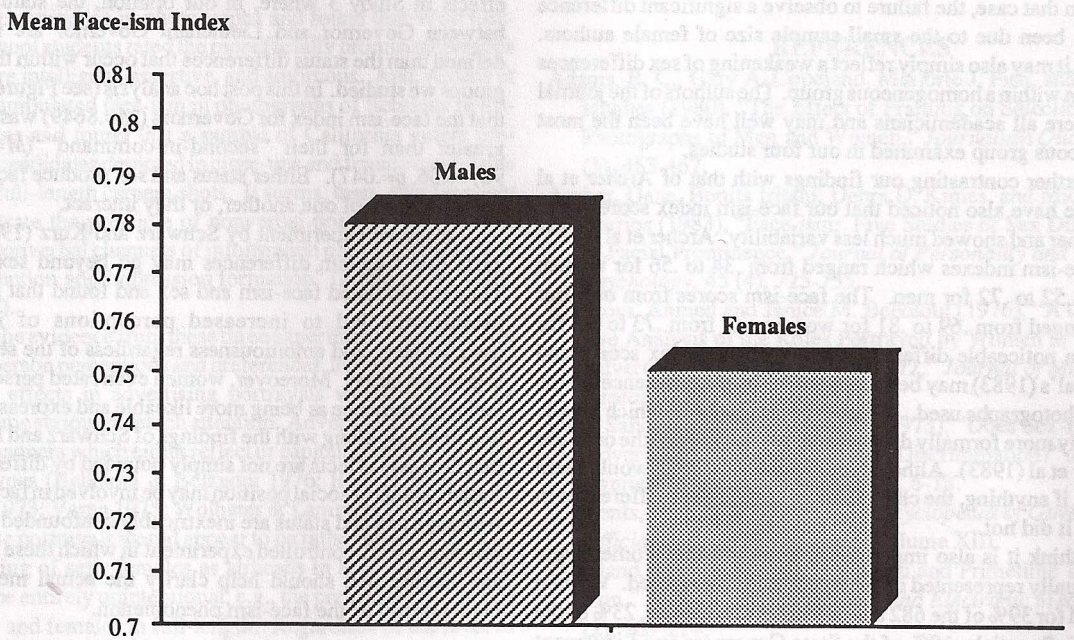
Archer et al (1983) found strong evidence for sex differences in face-ism in a variety of general interest magazines. Our series of

FIGURE 1
Face-ism Among Advertising Professionals



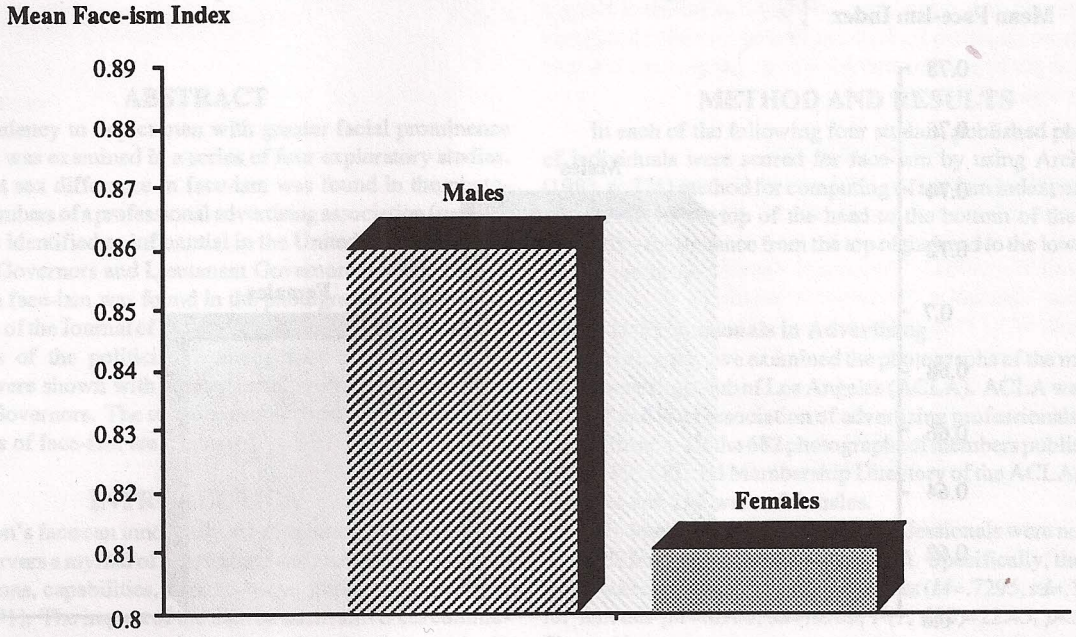
Note. N=682 (416 males and 266 females) photographs from the Official Membership Directory of the ADVERTISING CLUB OF LOS ANGELES, 1990-1991; $F(1,680)=22.45$, $p=.0001$.

FIGURE 2
Face-ism Among Hispanic Influentials



Note. N=100 (77 males and 23 females) photographs from the October 1991 issue of Hispanic Business; $F(1, 98)=5.60$, $p=.02$.

FIGURE 3
Face-ism Among Public Servants



Note. N=98 (88 males and 10 females) photographs of U.S. State Governors and Lieutentant Governors from Taylor's Encyclopedia of Government Officials, 1991; $F(1, 96)=3.83$, $p=.053$.

four exploratory studies extended the face-ism search to groups of persons relatively more homogeneous in profession (advertising professionals and state politicians) and status (Hispanic influentials) than one would expect to find in the pages of general interest magazines. Nevertheless, we, too, found considerable evidence for sex differences in face-ism. The lone exception occurred in the analysis of the photographs of authors of a leading advertising journal. In that case, the failure to observe a significant difference may have been due to the small sample size of female authors. However, it may also simply reflect a weakening of sex differences in face-ism within a homogeneous group. The authors of the journal articles were all academicians and may well have been the most homogeneous group examined in our four studies.

In further contrasting our findings with that of Archer et al (1983), we have also noticed that our face-ism index scores were much higher and showed much less variability. Archer et al (1983) found face-ism indexes which ranged from .34 to .56 for women and from .52 to .72 for men. The face-ism scores from our four studies ranged from .69 to .81 for women and from .73 to .86 for men. The noticeable differences between our index scores and Archer et al's (1983) may be accounted for by the differences in the types of photographs used. We used photographs in which people were surely more formally dressed and less active than the ones use by Archer et al (1983). Although our choice of stimuli would seem to reduce, if anything, the chances of our finding sex differences in face-ism, it did not.

We think it is also important to point out that women were hardly equally represented in the four groups we studied. Women accounted for 39% of the 682 advertising professionals, 23% of the Hispanic influentials, 10% of the State Governors and Lieutenant Governors, and 18% of the authors of articles in the recent issues of the Journal of Advertising Research. Our visual "landscape," then, was predominately male, as was Archer et al's (1983, p. 727). Given the virtual certainty that sex differences and status differences go hand-in-hand, different kinds of face-ism tendencies may occur for landscapes which are predominately female.

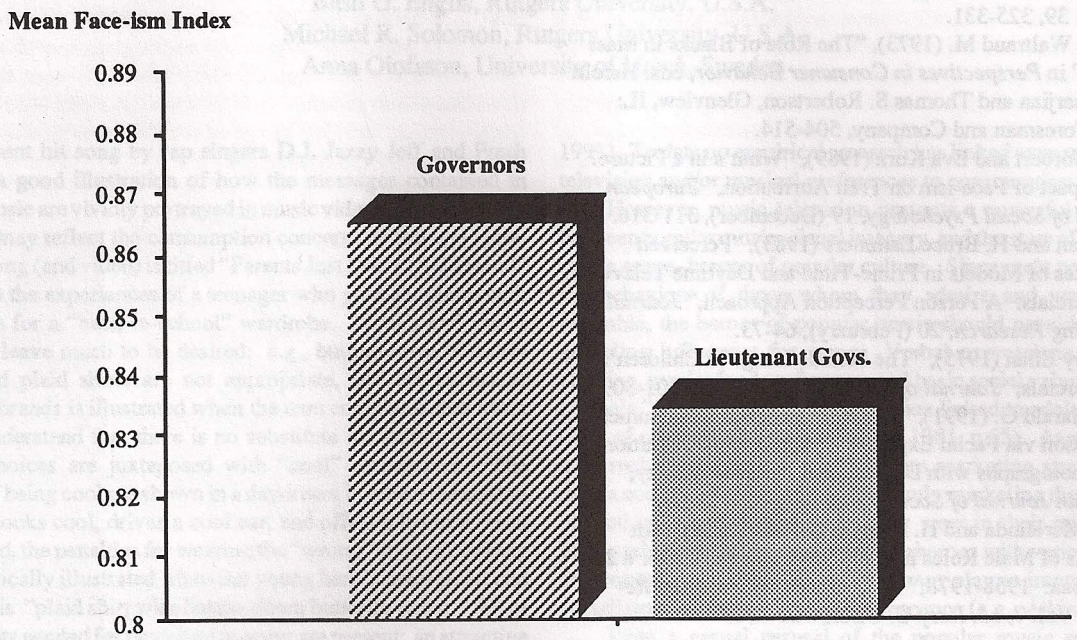
Perhaps sex differences in face-ism are mediated entirely by status differences. Although the exploratory nature of the present studies precludes a direct test of this possibility, some provocative indirect evidence of this was obtained. We looked again at face-ism effects in Study 3 where, in our opinion, the status differences between Governor and Lieutenant Governor are more clearly defined than the status differences that occur within the other three groups we studied. In this post hoc analysis (see Figure 4), we found that the face-ism index for Governors (M=.8649) was significantly greater than for their "second-in-command" (M=.8358, $F(1, 96)=4.06$, $p=.047$). Either status and sex produce face-ism effects independently of one another, or they interact.

A recent experiment by Schwarz and Kurz (1989) also suggests that face-ism differences may go beyond sex differences. They manipulated face-ism and sex and found that greater facial prominence led to increased perceptions of intelligence, assertiveness, and ambitiousness regardless of the sex of the photographed target. Moreover, women even rated persons of greater facial prominence as being more likeable and expressive. Our post hoc findings, along with the findings of Schwarz and Kurz, suggest that face-ism effects are not simply bounded by differences in sex. Rather, status or social position may be involved in face-ism effects. Although sex and status are inextricably confounded in real-world settings, a well-controlled experiment in which these two variables are manipulated should help clarify the actual mediator(s) and moderator(s) of the face-ism phenomenon.

Socio-Consumer Behavior Implications of Face-Ism

Our exploratory studies, like most of the research on face-ism, were descriptive in nature and do not provide direct evidence that

FIGURE 4
Status-Related Face-ism



Note. N=98 (50 Governors and 48 Lieutenant Governors) photographs from Taylor's Encyclopedia of Government Officials, 1991; $F(1, 96)=4.06$, $p=.047$.

face-ism affects person perceptions. Although we are aware of only three studies which employed experimental research designs on face-ism effects, the results of those three experiments strongly suggest that there is such a causal link. Archer et al (1983, Study 5) manipulated facial prominence in a series of 12 photographs and found that American university students gave higher ratings of intelligence, ambition, and physical appearance to the more facially prominent stimuli. Similarly, Schwarz and Kurz (1989) manipulated facial prominence in photographs and found that West German high school students rated the more facially prominent persons as being more intelligent, assertive, and ambitious. And, Adams et al (1980) manipulated face-ism in photographs of fictitious political candidates and found that a sample of California voters preferred male candidates depicted in close-ups and female candidates depicted in full-length camera shots. It seems, then, that face-ism effects illustrate the principle of nonverbal primacy, which contends that "nonverbal channels of information play a central role in person perception and impression formation" (Archer et al 1983, pp. 733-734).

Given the evidence from these three experiments that face-ism does affect person perceptions and preferences, the potential impact of face-ism effects in advertising portrayals would seem to be worthy of some serious research attention. Advertisers may portray persons in manners which either reflect or capitalize on sex and race role stereotypes (Belkaoui & Belkaoui 1976; Bem & Bem 1973; Kassarjian 1973; Verna 1975; Wolheter & Lammers 1980). While some of these portrayals would appear to be rather intentional, e.g., the typecasting of sexy females as airheads in beer commercials, others may be entirely unintentional, e.g., the presentation of males in close-ups and females in full-length. Regardless of the level of intentionality, then, the impact of face-ism in advertising situations may be to perpetuate existing stereotypic perceptions of the sexes and races.

We conclude from our findings and the findings of other face-ism researchers that face-ism differences do occur, wittingly or otherwise, and that face-ism affects person perceptions and images. Although face-ism is in most cases probably a passive, but not necessarily harmless, reflection of stereotypic beliefs, it may be used to actively manipulate the image of others. The malicious tone of the latter notion sets the call for more research on the causes and effects of face-ism.

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