Do good looks get high school students good grades?

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Do personal traits predict success in school? If so, which dimension of one's outward appearance can tell the most about academic achievement? The answers to these questions are found in a new study by researchers from the University of Miami Health Economics Research Group. The study is the first to demonstrate that non-cognitive traits play an important role in the assignment of grades in high school.

Economists have examined the role that beauty plays on the type of employment, earnings, productivity and the likelihood of politicians being elected to office, and have wondered if "beauty premiums" and "plainness penalties" in the labor market come from an accumulation of differences in attention and rewards received from teachers throughout the school years. Findings from this peer-reviewed study titled: "Effects of Physical Attractiveness, Personality and Grooming on Academic Performance in High School" will be published in the next issue of *Labour Economics*.

The study offers a new perspective in an area of research that until now was almost exclusively focused on adults. It examines the effect of three personal characteristics--physical attractiveness, personality and grooming--on students' grade point averages (GPA) in high school. The primary objective is to determine which aspects of these non-cognitive personal traits are more strongly linked to academic achievement, said Michael T. French, professor of health economics in the UM College of Arts and Sciences and one of the authors of the study.

"Several studies in the literature have found that physical attractiveness is significantly related to labor market earnings for men and women. Thus, we were somewhat surprised to find that physical attractiveness was not the most important non-cognitive predictor of grades," French said. "Instead grooming and personality were stronger predictors of academic success in high school for boys and girls, respectively."

Looking at GPA as a function of a long list of individual, familial, school, and environmental characteristics that are likely to affect academic performance, the researchers were able to make several significant observations, including:

- Physical attractiveness has a positive effect on GPA for both genders, but only when considered alone.

- When physical attractiveness is considered along with grooming and personality, the positive effect of physical attractiveness on high school GPA turns negative for both genders.

- For male students, grooming delivers the biggest overall effect on GPA.

- For female students, personality is positively related to GPA.

- Physical appearance can be a way for adolescents to either rebel or accept adult's standards. However, whether the student is a "rebel" or a "conformist" does not have a significant independent effect on GPA.

- The findings suggest that some degree of teacher bias is present in favor of, or against certain types of students.

- All else equal, Hispanics and African Americans have lower GPAs than whites and girls have higher GPAs than males.

- Students living with a mother who attended college, those that live in a two-parent household and those attending a small school have higher GPAs than those in different circumstances.

- Receiving public assistance is negatively associated with GPA.

In conclusion, the study posits that students may be able to "trade-off" different personal characteristics to improve academic achievement and that this trend may affect future success in college, the labor market and family formation.

Source: University of Miami ([news](#) : [web](#))

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