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Intelligence and Attractiveness: Do Better Grades Cause an Assumption of Attractiveness?

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Background

A study in 1978 discovered that teachers tended to favor more attractive students when evaluating their academic work. (Demeis & Turner, 1978.).

In the United States, attractiveness is positively correlated with intelligence. ($r=.126$) (Kanizawa, 2011)

Another study indicated that the actual quality of academic work is not necessarily linked to the grade given on the assignment. (Begany, et al. 2008)

Are college students likely to assume attractiveness based on the quality of academic work? Would a letter grade of varying quality on the paper affect this assumption?

Our hypothesis was that participants would more frequently indicate an attractive student as the author of a high quality essay, regardless of letter grade, and vice versa with an unattractive student and an essay of lesser quality.

Method

Our study consisted of 62 students aged 18-22 at a small private Christian university.

76% female, 24% male.

51 Caucasian, 3 African American, 1 Asian, 4 Hispanic, 3 Other

Measures

- The Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) for measuring Big Five Personality Traits
- A survey consisting of questions about the student chose. The participants respond on a 5 point Likert Scale with 1 being “not very” and 5 being “very”.: This covered attractiveness, popularity, agreeableness, responsibility, intelligence, humor, caring, level of social activity, and studiousness.

Materials

- Two yearbook pictures of college students, one attractive and the other unattractive as determined by pilot testing.

Participants were randomly handed one of four conditions: High quality essay with “A” grade, low quality essay with “A” grade, high quality essay with “C” grade, or low quality essay with “C” grade.

After reading the essay, the packet asked the participant to select the student that they though had written the essay. After choosing the author, participants were asked to assess that student using the measures above.

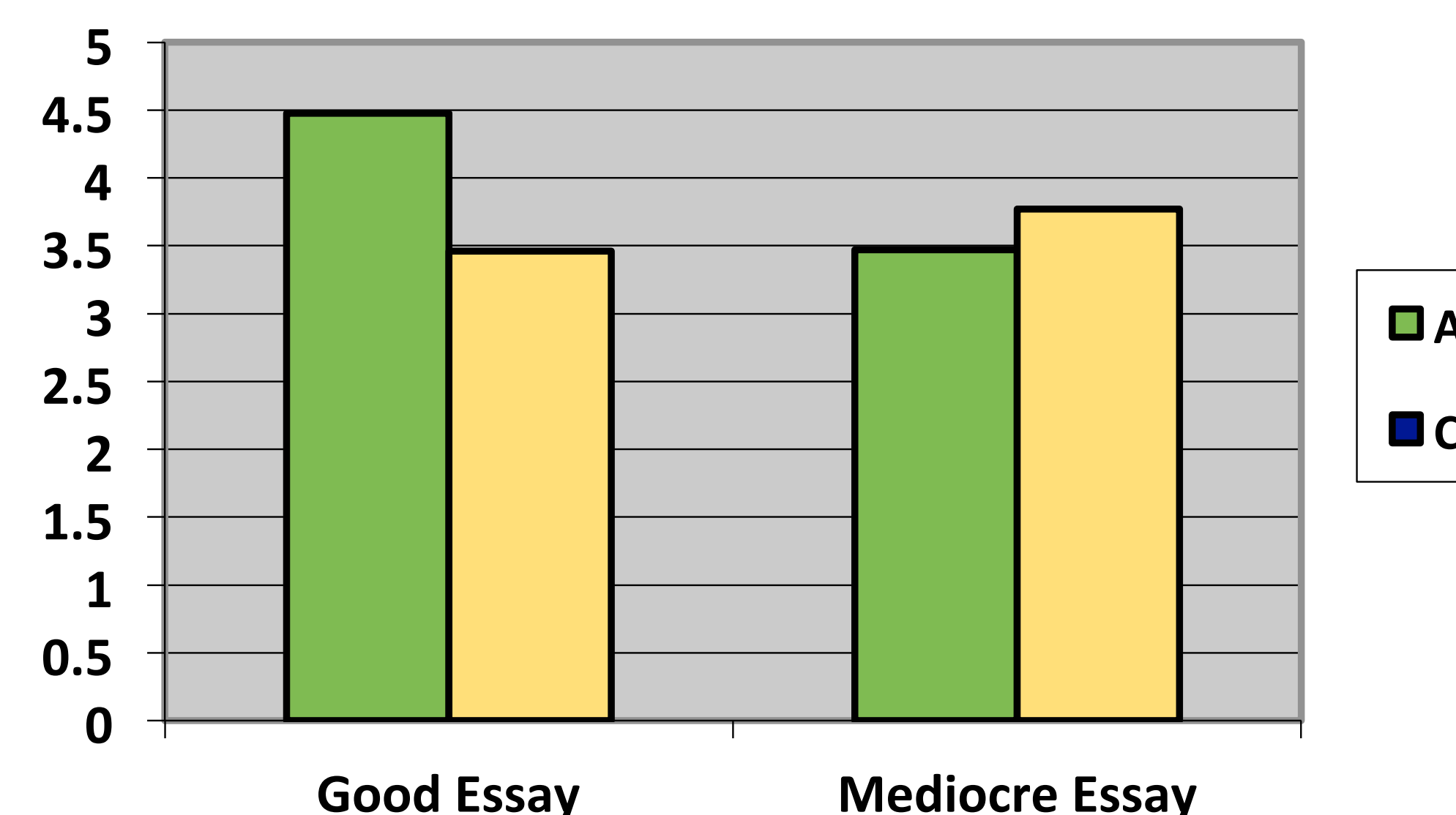
We recorded as the dependent variable whether participants selected the attractive or unattractive student. The survey served to check that the participant agreed with the pilot testers’ assessment of the students’ attractiveness.

Results

There was no significant connection between the quality of the essay and the attractiveness of the student chosen $f(1,61)=1.01, p<.05$

There was also no significant connection between the grade on the paper and the attractiveness of the student $f(1,61)=1.08, p<.05$

There was a significant difference on the high quality essay between the grade and attractive of the student as rated by participant $f(1,29)=5.07, p<.05$.



For participants who had the high quality essay with the grade of A, the mean rating for attractiveness was 4.47 on a five point scale.

For those who had the high quality essay with a C grade the mean was 3.46 on a five point scale

The mediocre essay showed no significant difference in ratings of attractiveness for grades. (See Graph)

Conclusions

- Participants do not assume a student is attractive simply on the basis of academic paper quality or letter grade.
- However, participants assume a student is attractive only if the paper and the grade are both high.
- Future directions for this study could consist of research regarding business psychology, particularly in the area of résumés and job application.
- Studies regarding the social psychology of interactions academic excellence, the perception of the grade, and the attractiveness of the student would prove enlightening.

References

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