ABSTRACT

On the basis of cultural transmission, an implicit association could be created between formal clothing and expectations concerning the social status of its wearer. Imitation of successful individuals by means of grooming can increase the prestige and mate value, which can be reflected upon direct interaction with others. Displays of pride and self-esteem as a sign of high social status provide valuable information towards potential partners. Feeling of pride and success invoked by the type of clothing could affect nonverbal expressions. Changes in behavior as a result of wearing high status clothes may be connected to nonverbal traits which are linked to perceived dominance, self-esteem and attractiveness. Studies indicate that men who display more dynamic and expansive nonverbal traits are rated by women as more attractive and more masculine. They are also rated as more dominant by other men in comparison with men on whom these nonverbal traits do not manifest.

We tested the influence of formal and casual clothes on male nonverbal display and its judgment by women and men regarding dominance, self-esteem and attractiveness. We hypothesized that there will occur greater amounts of dynamic and expansive nonverbal traits in men wearing formal clothes than in the same men wearing casual clothes. Further, we hypothesized that the wearers of formal clothes will be rated by independent raters as more attractive, more self-esteem and more dominant than in the event of wearing casual clothes.

Forty men (mean age 22.65; SD = 2.507) were recorded while advertising a gender neutral product to a fictional audience. They were dressed either in a white t-shirt and dark jeans or in a black suit with a white shirt. Video clips of the overall body were edited to black-and-white (enhanced contrast, muted). Nonverbal traits chosen from previous studies or adjusted for our sample were reused in ethogram for analysis of the video clips. We also took standardized photographs of the face and overall body of every participant.

We recruited 44 men (mean age 22.11; SD = 2.517) and 38 women (mean age 20.71; SD = 1.558) for the rating of the video clips on a 7-point scale of attractiveness, self-esteem and dominance. Another group of women was used to rate photos of the face and overall body of these participants on a 7-point scale of attractiveness.