Judging a book by its cover
- Perception of clothing styles and inferences on personality traits and likeability

Emperiepraktikum Empirical Aesthetics by Itay Goetz
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Introduction

Based on personal experiences, people often make generalized assumptions known as stereotypes. These stereotypes can be functional because they save energy and resources when processing information (Hilton, J. L., von Hippel, W., 1996). Various studies have already investigated how clothing styles are perceived in relation to traits such as competence and warmth (Chang, Y., Cortina, J.M., 2023). This has motivated us to explore whether clothing style is also stereotypically associated with the Big Five personality traits. Understanding this topic is crucial, as certain perceptions and associations can influence how individuals are treated and viewed by others.

Methodology

Explorative Study

Quasi-Independent Variables:
- Clothing style of participants
- Gender, age, educational background, current occupation

On Screen:
Presentation of AI-generated images (software: MidJourney) of a man and a woman in each clothing style. Faces were pixelated to control for the confounding variable of attractiveness.

Control Variable:
Question about general interest in fashion (rated from 1 to 5)

Clothing Styles

1. Alternative
2. Sporty
3. Casual
4. Elegant/Business
5. Gothic

For each clothing style:
- Likability of the person with the specific clothing style, rated from 1 to 5.
- Personal attractiveness of the clothing style, rated from 1 to 5.
- Assessment of personality traits of the person on a scale from 1 to 5 (shortened version of the Big Five and scale for creativity and trustworthiness)
- Participant's own clothing style (choice of one of the above categories or none).
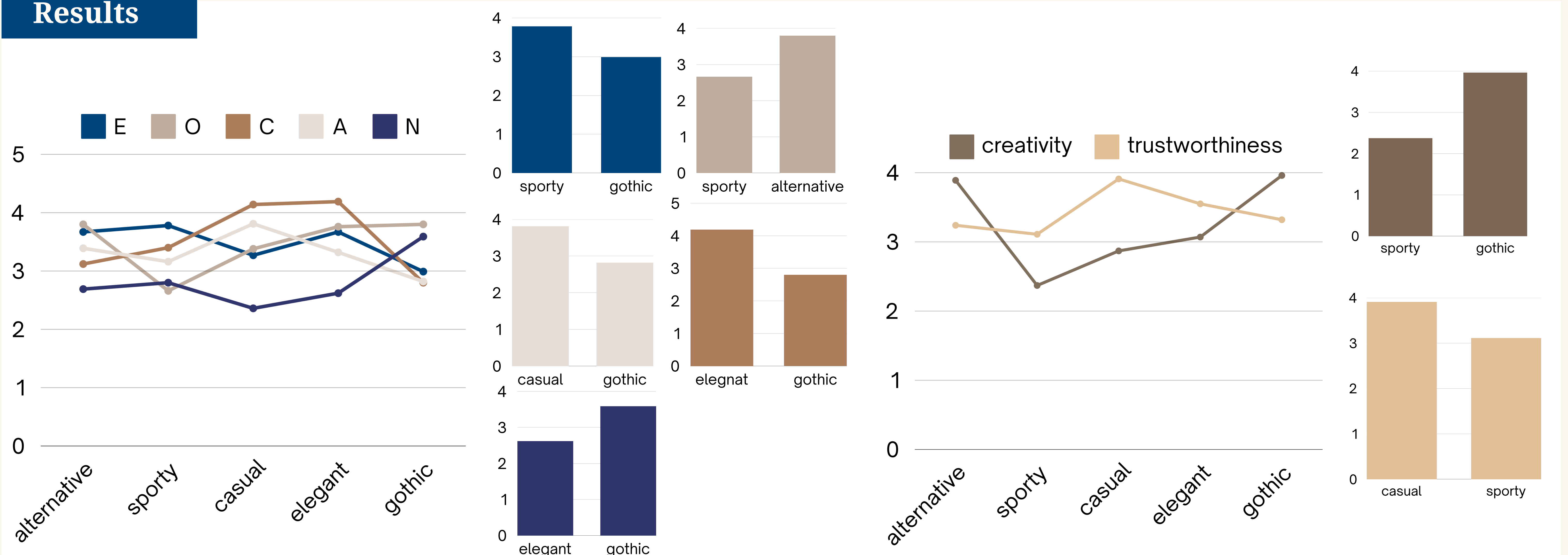

1.   2.   3.   4.   5.

Results

Conclusion

The findings suggest that clothing style can significantly affect our perception of a person, especially during first impressions. Factors such as prejudice are likely to contribute to this perception. Our study revealed that different styles of clothing can lead to assumptions about an individual's personality. It is crucial to continue exploring how clothing influences our perception once we become acquainted with a person.

Implications and Future Research

Limitations:
- Due to the limitations of AI image generation, we were unable to make all models look exactly the same. Variations in hairstyle, hair color, clothing color, accessories and stance can impact participants' ratings.

Future Research:
- Measure participants' scores on the Big Five dimensions and compare them with their ratings of clothing styles
- Conduct a similar study with physical people in real clothes instead of pictures

Related literature
Chang, Y., & Cortina, J. M. (2024). What should I wear to work?An integrative review of the impact of clothing in the workplace. Journal of Applied Psychology, 109(5), 755.
Danner, D., Rammstedt, B., Bluemke, M., Lechner, C., Berres, S., Knopf, T., Soto, C., & John, O. P. (2016). Die deutsche Version des Big Five Inventory 2 (BFI-2). Zusammenstellung sozialwissenschaftlicher Items und Skalen (ZIS). https://doi.org/10.6102/zis247