

Other studies also revealed the influence of different personality characteristics on social perception accuracy. Lippa and Dietz (2000) concluded that the intelligence and openness of the observer correlated with higher accuracy scores. Moreover, Hall and Halberstadt (1981) investigated the impact of masculinity/femininity, androgyny (masculinity plus femininity) and sex typing (masculinity minus femininity) on the fidelity on impression formation. It was hypothesized that subjects with higher femininity scores would be better judges. However the results showed no significant differences between participants with high/low scores, although males with high masculinity scores tended to be slightly more accurate. Moreover, men with high androgyny and women with high sex-typing scores proved to be better judges of video stimuli. Furthermore, partialling out masculinity/femininity bore no result on accuracy scores of men and women, suggesting that these characteristics are not the ones behind sex differences in person perception.

In a study conducted by Vogt and Colvin (2003) subjects were asked to rate the personality of a target person shown in a 12 min video. Their evaluations were compared with evaluations from self, family and friends of the confederate, thus obtaining accuracy scores. Subjects also filled in a personality questionnaire which, among others assessed their communion, which was defined as 'the need to become one with the group of others' (Bakan *apud* Vogt and Colvin, 2003, 269). As expected, women showed higher communion scores, as well as significantly higher accuracy ratings. However, when partialling out gender, differences in accuracy scores due to communion still remained significant.

Sex differences in impression formation fidelity are sometimes influenced by stimuli employed in the study. Murphy, Hall and Colvin (2003) noticed that female participants were better judges only when the target person was presented by means of a video sequence with sound. Conversely, silent movies or transcripts did not yield significant differences among sexes. Moreover, the meta-analysis conducted by Hall (1978) based on 75 studies on the topic of nonverbal decoding skills rendered similar results. However, only papers concerning emotions and states and not personality traits assessments were included. Differences in accuracy between men and women were more likely to occur when experiments employed stimuli with video and audio information. Nonetheless, the author draws attention to the fact that studies yielding sex dissimilarities were more likely to be published than the ones which failed to establish them. Additionally, since gender cannot be experimentally manipulated, it is possible that other variables which covariate with sex underlie differences in accuracy, thus yielding a spurious correlation. The earlier mentioned study conducted Vogt and Covin (2003) identified communion as playing an important role in social perception fidelity, notwithstanding gender.

An alternative explanation for differences in social perception accuracy is offered by Hoffman (1977). His meta-analysis on studies involving children revealed that girls, as compared to boys, are more inclined towards prosocial behavior, which includes, among others, empathy and interpersonal sensitivity. Therefore, it is in their nature to put themselves in somebody else's place, thus being able to imagine what they feel or think. Nevertheless, the meta-analysis conducted by Eisenberg and Lennon (1983) revealed that gender differences in empathy occur more often in studies which employ self-ratings or

Procedure

Data collection sessions were conducted on the 18th, 20th of November and the 4th of December 2008, for the high school group and on the 20th of November and the 4th of December 2009 for the university students.

In the high school session, participants were informed by the vice-principal that they will be asked to take part in a short experiment, which will take place in the psychology lab. This location was chosen due to its technological facilities (TV set and DVD-player) and also because of its limited seats. Only six students could participate in the experiment at a time, which permitted a better control of their behavior.

In the beginning, the experimenter presented himself and mentioned the subject of the investigation. He particularly informed the subjects that their answers were not going to be evaluated in terms of right or wrong. Furthermore, since every individual is unique, their personal opinion would be very important and it was therefore not recommended that they copied their neighbors' responses. After these instructions the participants watched the video sequence for the first time and then were told how to fill in the semantic differential. Then, they were shown the movie one more time before evaluating the actor. After everybody had finished, the subjects were encouraged to ask questions and they were thanked for their participation.

In the university session, the experiment was conducted either in a large classroom with above 100 seats or in a small classroom with about 30 seats. The participants were informed by their professor that they will be attending an experiment in the first part of the course. Further, the procedure copied the one used in the high school session, including instructions, instrument and debriefing sessions.

Results

Semantic Differential

Before testing the hypotheses, it is useful to take a look at the semantic differentials' fidelity and validity. Initially, it consisted of 23 adjectives grouped in four dimensions. Nevertheless, the factor analysis – using Principal axis factoring extraction and Varimax rotation – yielded a six factors solution and a KMO of 0.595. By successively eliminating the adjectives: funny – serious, slow – fast, slow – quick, interesting – not interesting, likeable – not likeable and happy – unhappy a four factor solution emerged which explains 59.87% of the data variance and yielding a KMO of 0.745 (Table 3). This structure was also validated by the individual internal consistency of the four scales: 0.648 for sociability, 0.770 for ethics, 0.822 for power and 0.810 for activity.