

Study: Kids think eyeglasses make other kids look smart

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Young children tend to think that other kids with glasses look smarter than kids who don't wear glasses, according to a new study. Children between the ages of 6 and 10 who were surveyed for the study also thought that kids wearing glasses looked more honest than children who don't wear glasses.

Otherwise, the survey suggested that children don't tend to judge the attractiveness of their peers who wear glasses when asked about their appearance, potential as a playmate or likely athletic abilities.

The findings might give children some comfort when they are fitted with their first pair of eyeglasses, said lead study author Jeffrey Walline, assistant professor of optometry at Ohio State University.

"If the impression of looking smarter will appeal to a child, I would use that information and tell the child it is based on research," Walline said. "Most kids getting glasses for the first time are sensitive about how they're going to look. Some kids simply refuse to wear glasses because they think they'll look ugly."

The study is published in the May issue of the journal *Ophthalmic and Physiological Optics*.

Walline surveyed children in this age range because they are more likely to be prescribed eyeglasses than contact lenses. Generally, children with nearsightedness are diagnosed with myopia and receive their first

corrective lenses at around age 8. Teen-agers were not surveyed because they are routinely fitted with contact lenses if they want them.

For the study, Walline and colleagues assembled a series of 24 pairs of pictures of children for comparison. The children in each pair differed by gender and ethnicity, and each pair included one child with glasses and one child without glasses.

Eighty young children – 42 girls and 38 boys – were surveyed. Of those, 30 kids (38 percent) wore glasses, 34 had at least one sibling with glasses and almost two-thirds had at least one parent who wore glasses.

The questionnaire featured six questions, many based on similar studies in adults. When presented with each pair of photos, the participants were asked which of the two children pictured: would you rather play with; looks smarter; looks better at playing sports; do you think is better looking; looks more shy; and looks more honest?

On average, two thirds of the participating children said they thought that kids wearing glasses looked smarter than kids not wearing glasses. And 57 percent of the participants said they thought kids with glasses appeared to be more honest. Both kids with and without glasses thought other kids wearing glasses looked smarter.

Walline said the findings suggest that media portrayals associating spectacles with intelligence may be reinforcing a stereotype that even young children accept.

In the case of the other four questions in the survey, the answers were not consistent enough to suggest that glasses made a difference in how the kids felt about the pictures they were examining.

Other trends emerged, however, that had nothing to do with whether the

kids in the pictures were wearing glasses and which supported conventional wisdom about kids' opinions. Both boys and girls said they thought that boys appeared to be better at playing sports. Boys indicated they would rather play with boys, and girls said they would prefer playing with girls. Both boys and girls thought the opposite gender looked more shy. Girls also were more likely than boys to pick their own gender when asked which child looked more honest.

The fact that the question of attractiveness yielded no significantly different answers for children with or without glasses suggests that kids don't automatically consider kids with glasses to be unattractive, Walline said.

"The concern about attractiveness with glasses seems to be more internal to a particular child rather than an indicator of how they'll feel about other people who wear glasses," Walline said.

Source: Ohio State University

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