

THE ROLE OF IMAGE NORMS IN SUPER'S CAREER STAGES

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of image norms in each stage of Super's Career Development Model. An image norm is the belief that people must possess a certain degree of physical attractiveness to work in certain occupations, organizations, and industries. Image norms describe beliefs about the importance of physical attractiveness in explaining career success in different jobs, companies, and fields. Image norms may influence individuals' employment decisions at several points in their careers. Image norms are hypothesized to influence each stage of Super's theory of careers as individuals confront the developmental tasks inherent in each stage.

SUPER'S CAREER STAGES

Image norms may play a large role in Super's Career Development Model [2]. Image norms may influence individuals' occupational and organizational choice decisions at all stages of their careers. Super's career development model [2] has greatly influenced research on career stages. Super describes five stages individuals go through in their careers, beginning with growth and ending with disengagement. Super's theory provides a comprehensive framework for examining how image norms may influence employment decisions at each stage of career development.

Physical attractiveness effects in organizations are well documented [1] and have been found in a number of organizational decision contexts including selection, evaluation, and compensation. Image norms may influence a decision-maker's perceptions about the requirements for successfully performing a job. If evaluators believe that it is necessary to possess a certain level of physical attractiveness to succeed in a job or progress in a company, then, attractive individuals will receive more favorable evaluations than unattractive individuals on a variety of job outcomes.

It is hypothesized that image norms operate in each stage of Super's model of career development to influence the occupational and organizational choice decisions individuals face throughout their careers. Future research will need to examine all aspects of image norms, including empirically exploring the influence of image norms on Super's career stages. More research is needed on all aspects of image norms including the process by which perceptions lead to image norms, and how these image norms affect individual and organizational career decisions. An understanding of the role image norms plays across career stages has important implications for career outcomes.

REFERENCES

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