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Clementine Bry, joint author of the French study



Marilyn Monroe



Paris Hilton



Mae West



Goldie Hawn

## A grain of truth in blonde stereotype?

Study finds exposure to fair-haired women causes dip in intellect

From Wire Reports

LONDON — From Marilyn Monroe to Paris Hilton, "blonde" has long been code for a woman who's long on looks and light on brains.

Now French researchers have found that the stereotype can actually affect mental performance.

A recent study showed that otherwise intelligent men performed below par on general knowledge tests after viewing photos of blond women.

The real surprise? Women's performance also dipped in the tests.

The study, published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, examined people's ability to answer Trivial Pursuit game questions after viewing photos of women with different hair colors.

Exposure to blondes resulted in the lowest scores.

Thierry Meyer, joint author of the study and professor of social psychology at the University of Paris X-Nanterre, said the study proves a general phenomenon.

"There's a decrease in performance after an unobtrusive exposure to a stereotype about people who have the reputation to be cognitively impaired," he said.

In plainer language, blondes might make people act in a less intelligent manner because the people believe — whether they want to admit it or not — that they are in the presence of someone who's not very smart.

Previous studies also have shown how information from a person's social context can influence their behavior.

For example, when people are exposed to elderly people, they tend to walk and talk more slowly. When people sit beside someone who is fidgeting, they tend to fidget as well.

"The mere knowledge of a stereotype can influence our behavior," said Clementine Bry, another author of the study.

It's not clear how the stereotype of the dumb blonde came about, although some researchers point to the 1950s movie *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* starring Marilyn Monroe.

But through the years a wide range of blond actresses — as varied as Mae West, Suzanne Somers and Goldie Hawn — have perpetuated the stereotype.

Dr. Bry was quick to point out that there is "absolutely no scientific evidence" to support the stereotype of the dumb blonde.

"Stereotypes are cultural beliefs about social groups, and are not truthful pictures of who people are," she said.

Shelley Emling,  
Cox News Service