

Parent and Child Preference of Dentist Appearance and PPE

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INTRODUCTION

Physical appearance plays a critical role in the dentist-child-parent relationship¹⁻³. A child can form a first impression of a dentist based on how the provider presents themselves, prior to any verbal introduction⁴. Several studies have attempted to challenge the perception of the white coat barrier in children. A meta-analysis of 30 studies found no difference in children's preference for white coat vs. child-friendly attire⁵. On the other hand, very few articles have investigated parent preference of dentist attire.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, personal protective equipment (PPE) has increased in global attention and demand. The use of appropriate PPE, including masks, gloves, gowns, and eyewear is currently recommended for routine patient care in reducing the risk of transmitting microorganisms to patients⁶. To our knowledge, limited studies have investigated the effect of PPE on children and parent's first impression of their pediatric dentist.

PURPOSE

This study aims to evaluate parent and child preferences of their pediatric dentist with regards to the provider's attire and PPE. Additionally, the relationship between the child and parent preferences will be explored.

METHODS

Patients aged 7-17 years and their legal guardian/parent at Children's Dental Health Clinic of Miller Children's Hospital and the USC Pediatric Dental Clinic were recruited. The electronic questionnaire consisted of one male and one female model (Figure 1) who posed for photographs wearing various combinations of attire (white coat, scrubs, business casual, surgical gown) and PPE. The PPE categories were no PPE, minimal PPE (surgical mask and eyewear) and maximal PPE (hair protection, face shield, N95 respirator, loupes).

The child questionnaire was designed to determine the child's preference for their dentist's gender, attire, and PPE (Figure 1). The parent questionnaire was designed to determine the parent's preference for their child's dentist's gender, attire, and PPE in addition to exploring character attributes of empathy, competence, communication, and engagement associated with the dentist's appearance.

Parents were asked demographic questions regarding themselves and their child. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

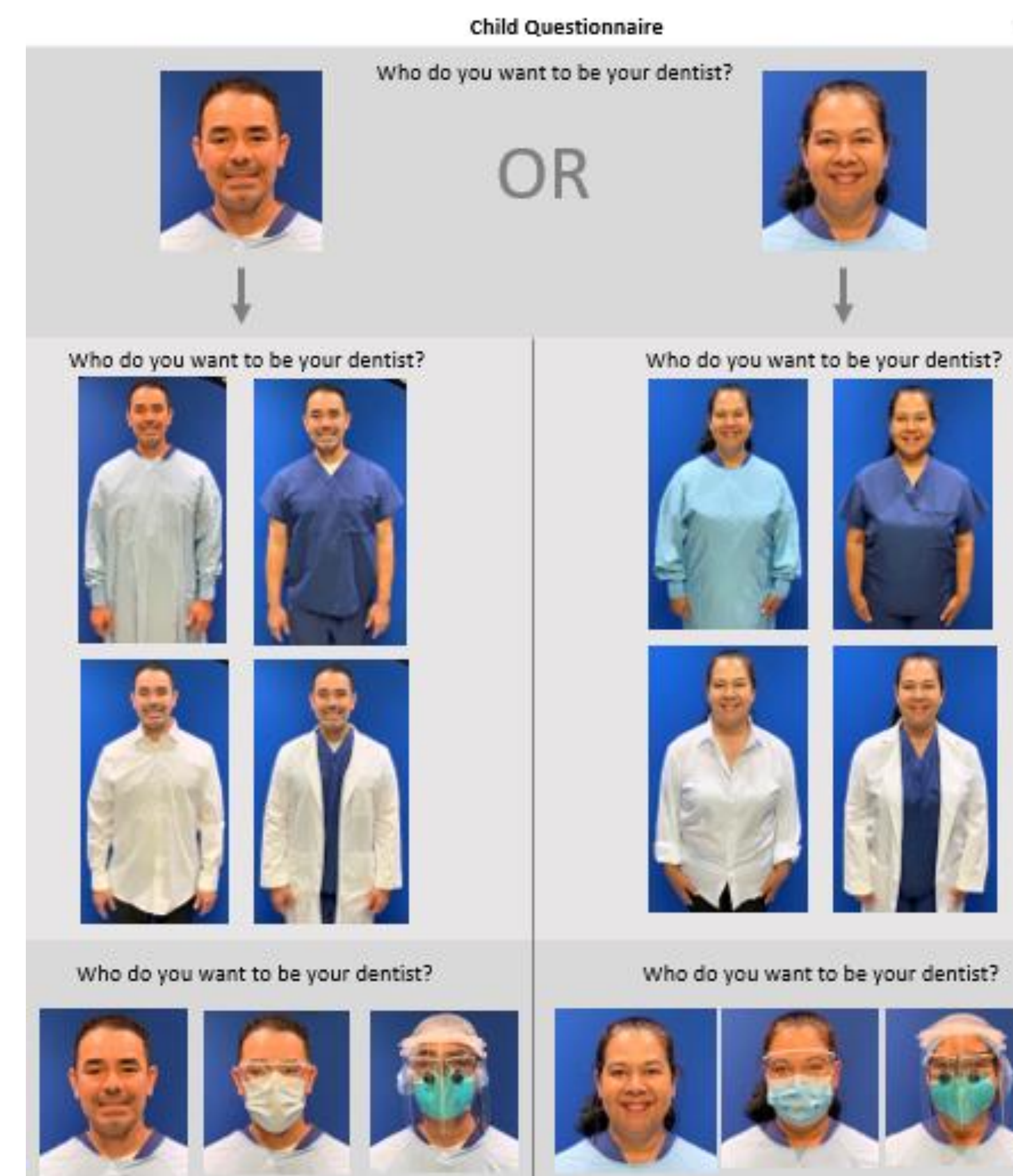


Figure 1. Child Questionnaire

Demographic Information		
	Parents	Children
Average age (yrs)	30-39	11
	N(%)	
Female sex	40 (93)	25 (58)
Race		
Black/African American	1 (0.02)	1 (0.02)
White/Caucasian	2 (0.04)	1 (0.02)
Asian	1 (0.02)	1 (0.02)
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1 (0.02)	1 (0.02)
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0	2 (0.04)
Latino/a	38 (88)	37 (86)
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	38 (88)	37 (86)
Non-Hispanic	5 (0.1)	6 (0.1)

Table 1. Demographics for Parent and Child Participants

RESULTS

Preliminary data includes a total of 43 completed parent and child questionnaires. Ninety-three percent of parents and 58% of children were female (Table 1). Hispanic ethnicity and Latino race were the most common for both parents and children.

Most parents (42%) preferred dentists wearing surgical gowns, while children (47%) preferred scrubs (Figure 2). Approximately two-thirds of parents (60%) and children (67%) favored providers wearing minimal PPE (eyewear and surgical mask only) (Figure 3). Business casual attire and no PPE were least preferred.

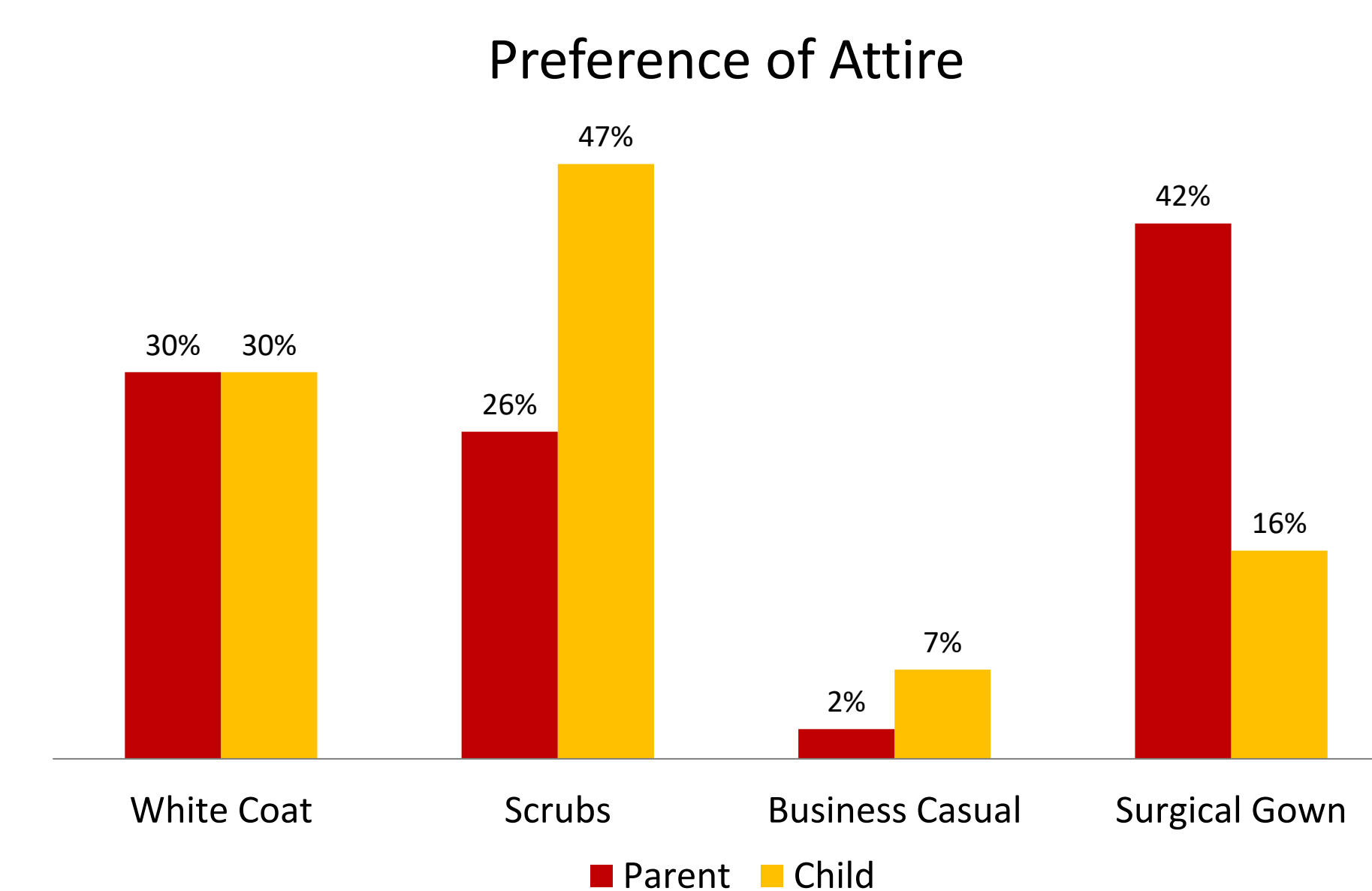


Figure 2. Parent and Child Preference of Dentist Attire

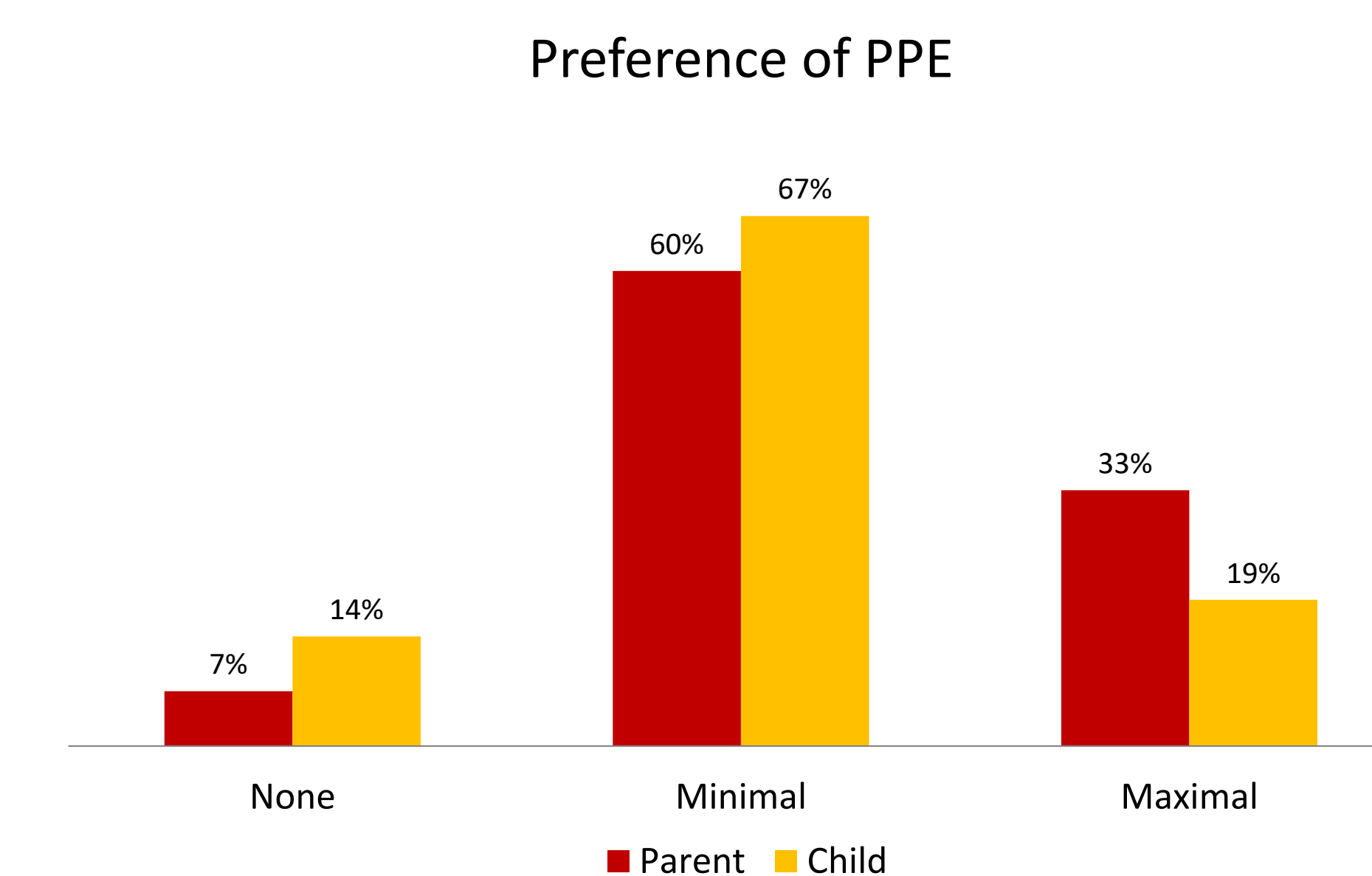


Figure 3. Parent and Child Preference of Amount of PPE

The majority of parents viewed providers in white coats as engaging and communicative, while surgical gowns were seen as empathetic and competent (Figure 4). Business casual attire was perceived as the least empathetic, competent, communicative and engaging.

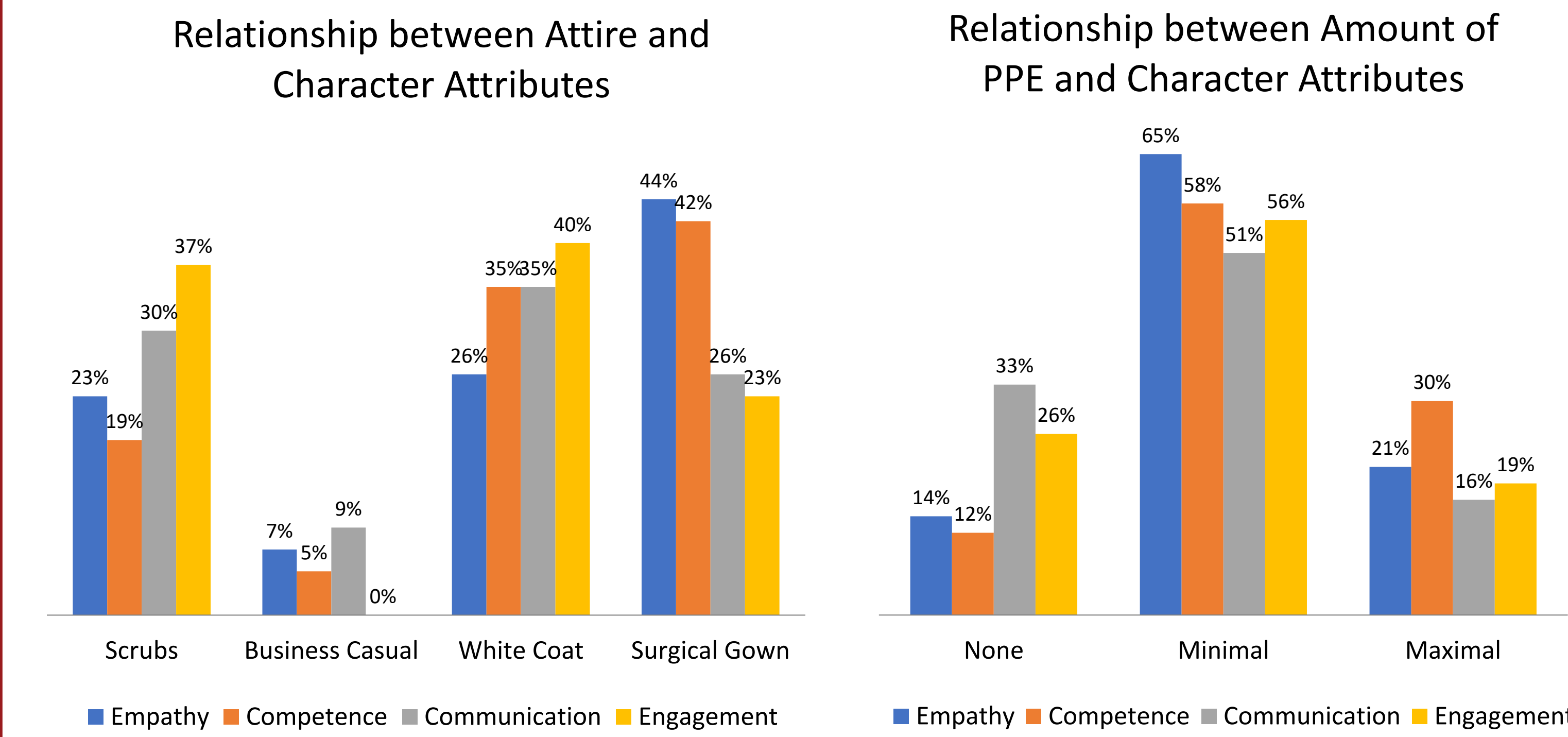


Figure 4. Relationship between Provider Attire and Character Attributes as Perceived by Parents

Figure 5. Relationship between Amount of PPE and Character Attributes as Perceived by Parents

Providers wearing minimal PPE were viewed by parents as more empathetic, competent, communicative and engaging (Figure 5). Lastly, a trend demonstrates that children and parents preferred dentists of the same gender as their child.

CONCLUSIONS

Scrubs and surgical gowns were favored amongst children and parents, respectively. White coats were considered to present a more communicative and engaging provider, while surgical gowns displayed empathy and competence. Most parents and children preferred a provider wearing minimal PPE, perceiving them as more empathetic, competent, communicative and engaging. This study may benefit practitioners in many health care fields with regards to improving their patient's first impression, which is crucial to achieving better treatment outcomes.

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