

Unattractive people more likely to be bullied at work, study shows

July 17 2013

It's common knowledge that high school can be a cruel environment where attractive students are considered "popular," and unattractive kids often get bullied. And, while that type of petty behavior is expected to vanish with adulthood, new research proves it does not.

Colleagues can be just as immature as [classmates](#).

The study by Timothy Judge, professor of management at the University of Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business, and Brent Scott from Michigan State University, is the first to link attractiveness to cruelty in the workplace.

In "Beauty, Personality, and Affect as Antecedents of Counterproductive Work Behavior Receipt," recently published in *Human Performance*, the researchers examine counterproductive work behavior and its effect on employees. They show that physical attractiveness plays as much of a role as personality in how a person is treated in the workplace. The researchers surveyed 114 workers at a health care facility, asking them how often their co-workers treated them cruelly, including saying hurtful things, acting rudely and making fun of them. Through digital photos, the workers' "attractiveness" was then judged by others who didn't know them.

"Our research is novel because it focuses on how [coworkers](#) treat attractive and unattractive colleagues," says Judge, who specializes in management psychology, gender, leadership personality and career and

life success. "We find that unattractive individuals are more likely the subject of rude, uncivil and even cruel treatment by their coworkers. And, not only do we, as a society, perceive attractive and unattractive coworkers differently, we act on those perceptions in ways that are hurtful."

Considerable research has been done in psychology, management and economics demonstrating that "beauty is good" for labor market outcomes, such as earnings, performance ratings and [career success](#). Attractive people are more self-confident and have higher self-esteem and they are perceived as more intelligent and moral. Research even indicates that seeing attractive individuals puts us in a better mood.

"Given that [physical attractiveness](#) is not a bona-fide occupational qualification for most jobs, our new findings are problematic for society," Judge says. "Worse, research reliably shows that we're more influenced by attractiveness than we are willing to admit."

It's a problem with no easy solution, especially given the increasingly visual nature of communication, according to Judge, who has written and been interviewed extensively about his gender, ambition and work stress research, among other studies.

"Awareness is surely one important step," Judge says. If we recognize our biases and are more open and honest about their pervasiveness, we'll be in much better shape to combat the influence."

Provided by University of Notre Dame

Citation: Unattractive people more likely to be bullied at work, study shows (2013, July 17) retrieved 24 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-07-unattractive-people-bullied.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.