

Attractive people wrongly assumed to be more trustworthy

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Attractive people are consistently judged to be more trustworthy though not behaving accordingly, as new research shows from emlyon business school.

The researchers also found that the influence on our judgement of others is independent of being attractive yourself: attractive people are just as much influenced by the looks of others when deciding whom to trust.

These findings come from research by Astrid Hopfensitz, Professor at emlyon business school, alongside her colleagues, Adam Zylbersztejn (University of Lyon), Zakaria Babutsidze (Université Côte d'Azur), and Nobuyuki Hanaki (Osaka University).

Previous studies into the impact of beauty and trustworthiness simply asked people to portray their beliefs about someone who they've seen an image of - with these pictures often taken from portrait databases or even computer generated.

Therefore, the researchers decided to observe the trustworthiness of different people, take photos of them, and later present these photos to other individuals for rating – in order to test their attractiveness and their trustworthiness simultaneously.

The researchers created an experiment, in which 357 volunteers played a hidden action game against another volunteer. A photo was taken of the participants and then they played the game which tested how trustworthy the volunteer was.

After this, their photographs were shown to 178 new participants, who were asked to predict how that person in the picture behaved in the game – which the researchers could then match to the true observed behaviour. Then a third group of volunteers simply rated how beautiful the participants in the photos were.

The results confirmed that those who were considered more beautiful were also considered more trustworthy. However, trust rankings and actual trustworthiness were not related.

The researchers also found that attractive people still fall prey to beauty bias – where people perceive someone to be better because they are attractive.

“With 'Beauty bias', or 'pretty privilege,' researchers label the unjustified beneficial treatments that more attractive individuals can receive.”, says Professor Hopfensitz. “Our research shows that the beauty industry is certainly thriving for a reason, but also that this creates an additional layer of inequalities and unjustified benefits to those judged as attractive.”

The researchers say that, in the professional setting, there is a need for recruiters and managers to recognize and mitigate these biases. For instance, organisations should ensure that measures like anonymous CVs, or photo-free applications are in place to stop the beauty influence on hiring decisions.

With previous research showing that beautiful people benefit from their looks in terms of better career trajectories, higher salaries, and better job opportunities, it is important that leaders and managers are aware of their biases, especially in today's fiercely competitive job market.

If you would like to receive the full research paper, or speak with the professor, please contact Peter Remon at BlueSky Education – peter@bluesky-pr.com +44 (0) 77 235 228 30.