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Laurier researcher finds female attractiveness negatively impacts hiring process

WATERLOO – A recent study published in *Management Science* by Bradley Ruffle, associate professor at the Lazaridis School of Business and Economics, found that while attractive men experience higher callbacks during the hiring process than “plain-looking” men, attractive women actually experience less success in getting an interview than plain-looking women.

The study, “[Are good-looking people more employable?](#)” investigated the role of attractiveness in the hiring process, challenging previous research that indicated people perceived as attractive are viewed to have better career prospects than people perceived as unattractive.

“The research demonstrates a bias in the hiring process and that we don’t just hire the most qualified candidates,” said Ruffle. “There is clearly discrimination based on attractiveness.”

Ruffle, along with his co-author Ze’ev Shtudiner of Ariel University in Israel, submitted over 5,000 resumes to junior positions in banking, budgeting, chartered accountancy, finance, accounts management, industrial engineering, computer programming, senior sales, junior sales and customer service. Resumes were prepared almost identically including the same levels of experience – the variant being an attached photo of an attractive candidate, a plain-looking candidate or no photo altogether. The study selected photos through a rigorous rating process, accounting for ethnicity, intelligence and attractiveness. Picture and no-picture resumes were sent in pairs to both hiring agencies and directly to companies.

Ruffle’s study found that attractive males received more invitations for a job interview than plain-looking males and no-photos resumes. However, the study also found that attractive females were penalized over their plain-looking female counterparts and resumes with no photo. The majority of biases were from resumes that were sent directly to the company, instead of to a hiring agency.

“Companies should consider the impact of beauty discrimination to their business in selecting the best person for the job,” said Ruffle.

In order to understand the prejudice against attractive females, Ruffle interviewed the companies to whom resumes were sent. Overwhelmingly, the hiring personnel were found to be young, female and single – possibly indicating a jealousy dynamic. The study accounted for intelligence and attractiveness – making the photos of attractive and plain looking women of equal intelligence, eliminating the possibility of the “bimbo effect.”

Ruffle says an anonymous hiring process could be the best practice for companies looking to select the best candidate for the position. Eliminating names and photos means hiring personnel can focus on the skills and experience that a candidate would bring to their team. Also, gender-balanced hiring committees would help to reduce the favoritism of attractive males and discrimination against good-looking females.