

# Activation of the “What is beautiful is good” stereotype during job candidate selection: What is the role of the recruiter’s own characteristics?

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## About the authors

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## Abstract

When a recruiter is assessing a large number of job candidates, the stereotype “What is beautiful is good” can be used as a cognitive shortcut towards a quick decision. Previous literature has not explained the role of individual differences among recruiters. This article is drawing a possible connection between

activation of the stereotype “What is beautiful is good” and recruiters’ ideological attitudes, personality, their own physical attractiveness, and their socio-demographic characteristics. Understanding these relations could help to improve selection processes by reducing bias in hiring decisions based on stereotypical thinking. Recruitment staff should be trained about social cognition and Human Resource (HR) departments should establish protocols and policies that anonymise job applicants. HR departments should commission psychometric testing to evaluate personality/ideological attitudes of potential would-be recruitment staff and gain advice about the implications of staff test scores.

## Introduction

The purpose of the hiring process is to select the most appropriate candidate for the job and the organization. When there are a large number of potential job

candidates and limited time resources, recruiters have to obtain the information they need quickly to help them make a decision. Unfortunately, stereotypes such as the physical attractiveness of job candidates become important cognitive resources used by the interviewer to make an assumption about how well a given candidate will suit the job (Desrumaux, Bosscher, & Leoni, 2009). Desrumaux and colleagues (2009) revealed that candidates' physical attractiveness influenced decisions about their 'hireability': attractive candidates were evaluated as possessing more job-relevant qualities and were more often selected for the job.

Stereotypes are prejudices or beliefs about the characteristics of people from a particular group of individuals, who are seen as sharing the same attributes (Fiske & Macrae, 2012, p. 76). Stereotypes can be positive or negative beliefs. For instance, negative gender stereotypes suggest that women are worse at mathematics than men, whereas positive gender stereotyping suggests that women leaders are better at nurturing team cohesion than male leaders. Consequently, stereotyping creates a feeling that a recruiter knows what a candidate is like and if they will

suit the organization. This assumption becomes problematic if there is a mismatch between the candidate's actual traits and abilities and those suggested by the stereotype; the attractive candidate receives an undue privilege and the less attractive candidate is deprived of an opportunity.

The stereotype that "What is beautiful is good" exists and is pervasive in human consciousness (Lorenzo, Biesanz, & Human, 2010) involving the belief that physically attractive people possess other positive characteristics, for example, that they are also reliable, trustworthy, and efficient. Based on this stereotype, less attractive individuals could be discriminated against in work-related situations, including during the candidate selection process. Researchers have shown that physically attractive people receive more favourable treatment during hiring, promotion, assignment of pay and benefits, and they are also evaluated more positively by managers (Harper, 2000; Hosoda, Stone-Romero, & Coats, 2003; Langlois et al., 2000; Mobious & Rosenblat, 2006). Söderlund and Julander (2009) suggest that a worker's attractiveness is also related to better performance evaluations and even higher customer satisfaction. Even though less

physically attractive individuals face negative outcomes in a variety of work-related situations, the discrimination they face during the hiring decision-making process is one of the most serious outcomes of the stereotype that “What is beautiful is good”. Discrimination during the selection process can cut-off or even delay the possibility of less physically attractive individuals entering the labour market.

Although many studies have demonstrated a strong effect of physical appearance on hiring decisions, previous literature is limited in not having explained the role of individual differences among recruiters (Desrumaux et al., 2009) or the complex interactions between the factors involved. Recruiters vary in personality, physical attractiveness, ideology, gender, age and other ways; and so their own characteristics can work as a reference-point when it comes to judging candidates’ attractiveness and applying (or not applying) the stereotype that “What is beautiful is good”. Further, recruiters’ own characteristics could cognitively reinforce or reduce the effect of the stereotype that “What is beautiful is good” and determine how favourable their attitude is toward a physically attractive job candidate. Taking this into

consideration, the current article focuses on the role of recruiters’ characteristics in the activation of stereotypes about physically attractive job candidates. The purpose of this article is to review previous literature about the topic and extrapolate research findings which reveal how different sorts of social characteristics influence the activation of the stereotype that “What is beautiful is good” and its consequences for a hiring decision.

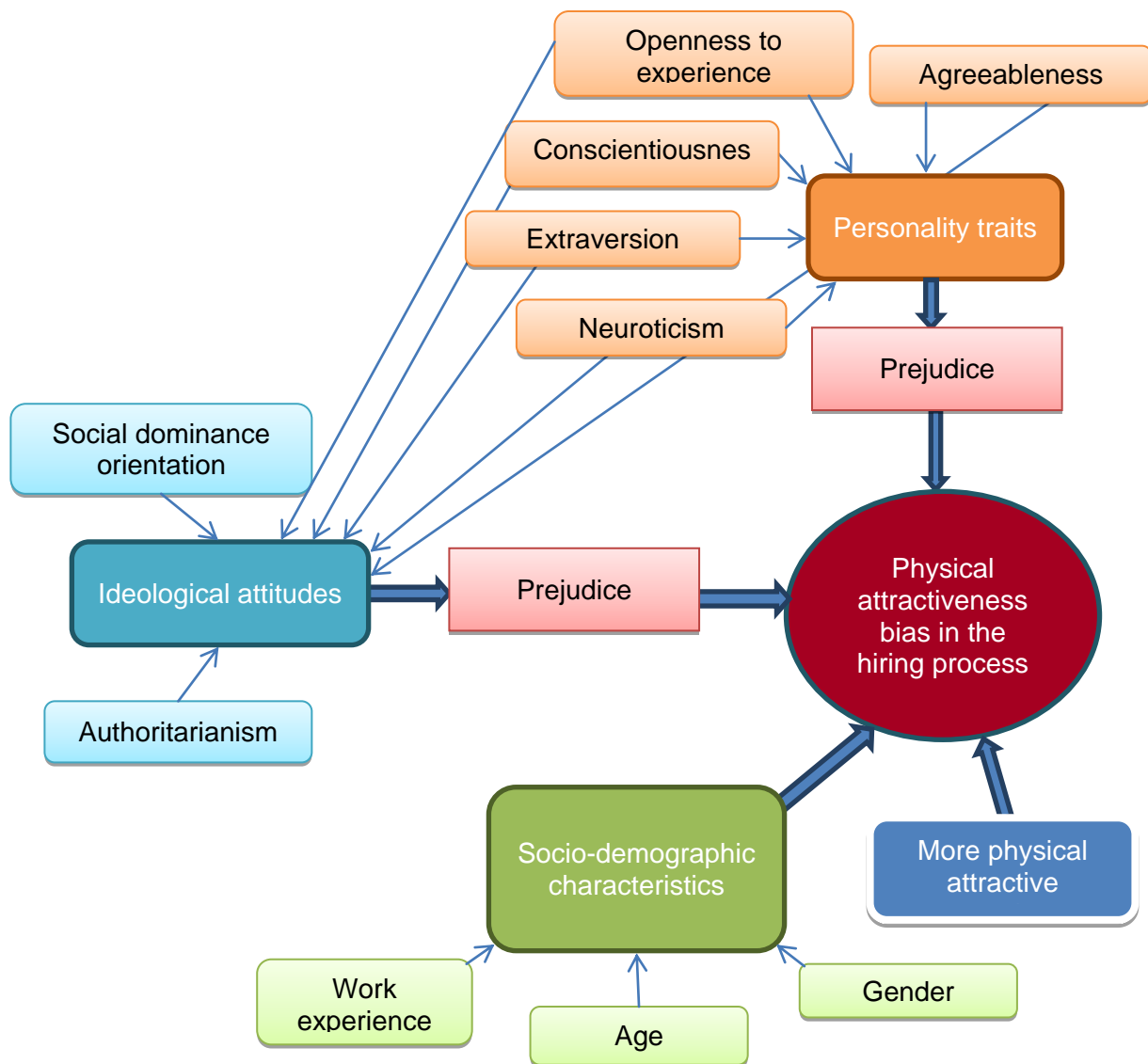
### **Overview**

This article focuses on four types of recruiter characteristics: a) the recruiter’s personal beliefs (e.g., authoritarian ideology, social dominance orientation); b) characteristics of the recruiter’s personality traits (e.g., extraversion, conscientiousness); c) the recruiter’s socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, and employment experience); and d) the concerns the recruiter has over his/her own physical attractiveness. Figure 1 below shows the pattern of relationships between these four sets of recruiter characteristics and bias towards physically attractive job candidates during the hiring process. These factors play a primary role in the process of evaluating others and determining the level of prejudice held against particular groups

(Agthe, Spörrle, & Maner, 2011; Cohrs, Kampfe-Hargrave, & Riemann, 2012; Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007; Foos & Clark, 2011; Haas & Gregory, 2005;

Marlowe, Schneider, & Nelson, 1996; McFarland, 2010; Senior, Thomson, Badger, & Butler, 2007).

**Figure 1:** Factors shaping the activation of the stereotype that “What is beautiful is good”



## **The role of the recruiter's ideological attitudes activating the "What is beautiful is good" stereotype**

People hold certain beliefs or ideological attitudes which shape their perception of their surrounding world (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). In recent years, researchers have been especially interested in two kinds of ideological attitudes: authoritarianism and social dominance orientation (McFarland, 2010; Cohrs et al., 2012). Authoritarianism involves believing in submission to authority, convention, and is negatively related to the idea of democracy (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Altemeyer, 2004). Social dominance orientation involves believing in group-based hierarchies, inequality between individuals, and social power (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Research shows that these ideological attitudes are closely related to prejudice and can have the impact of shaping discriminative decisions against particular groups (Altemeyer, 2004; Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007; Hodson, Hogg, & MacInnis, 2009; Sibley & Duckitt, 2009).

Even though some authors analyse ideological attitudes as personality traits we distinguish between these two types of characteristics. Duckitt and Sibley

(2010) pointed out that ideological attitudes should not be conflated with personality traits because ideological attitudes reflect social attitudes and beliefs and do not describe reactions and behaviours like personality traits do. Also, it should be noted that authoritarianism and social dominance orientation can change over time, contrary to personality traits that are relatively stable in adulthood (McCrae & Costa, 2008).

In terms of ideological attitudes, there are some typologies. First, *right-wing authoritarianism* (RWA) was described by Altemeyer (1981) and subsequent research showed that such authoritarianism relates to being prejudiced (Cohrs et al., 2012; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). Individuals high in RWA can be described as being politically conservative; they value traditional norms and stability. They also tend to be rigid and inflexible, and considering only their own values and moral rules over those of others (Cohrs et al., 2012; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). Having an authoritarian attitude makes an individual perceive the world as a dangerous place to live in and they feel the need for social order that will create stability and security. As a result, individuals high in RWA tend to discriminate against other people who are

perceived as socially threatening as these characteristics do not conform to accepted social norms (Cohrs et al., 2012; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; Mazeikiene & Sulcaite, 2010; McFarland, 2010). Cohrs and colleagues (2012) and McFarland (2010) found that scores in RWA relate to general prejudice (e.g., sexism, homophobia, extreme in-group patriotism, prejudice toward foreigners and against disabled people).

There is little variation in how people evaluate others' level of attractiveness; researchers have found a considerable degree of consensus in how different people rate others' attractiveness (Langlois et al., 2000). Recruiters who hold authoritarian ideologies can therefore evaluate job candidates who are low in physical attractiveness as deviants from the norm who are lower in the societal pecking order and consequently not worth being hired. In addition, a study by Swami et al. (2011) showed that individuals high in RWA have a narrower idea of what is beautiful; for example, they were less likely to judge people with a facial piercing positively, compared to individuals low in RWA. This phenomenon is likely extends to other 'unusual' aspects of a candidate's

physical appearance, such as non-normative weight, height or clothing style.

A second, important, type of ideological attitude is *social dominance orientation* (SDO). This is the tendency to justify unequal social outcomes as inevitable consequence of the social hierarchy (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; McFarland, 2010; Sibley & Duckitt, 2009). Social dominance believers are not very agreeable, are tough-minded and they pursue their own interests; they also value dominance as well as personal and group power (Cohrs et al., 2012; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). Their attitude about the world is that the strong survive and the weak lose and they see the world as a competitive place dominated by some and having a hierarchical social order. It is not surprising that SDO, which justifies inequality between groups, relates to prejudiced decision-making (Cohrs et al., 2012; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). Taking into account the fact that people tend to divide other people into separate groups based on their physical appearance (Gulas & McKeage, 2000), the propensity to discriminate against others could be especially important in determining someone's use of such categorisation. A recruiter's SDO can shape their categorisation of job candidates on the

basis of their physical attractiveness and this categorisation then becomes the basis for the decision about the applicants' suitability for the job.

It is also worth noting that individuals high in SDO express negative feelings toward people in low status groups (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). Considering that physically less attractive individuals are judged as having a lower status (Anderson, John, Ketner, & Kring, 2001; Senior et al., 2007), this view could explain why individuals high in SDO tend to evaluate less physically attractive candidates as having less positive attributes (Asbrock, Sibley, & Duckitt, 2010). Therefore, a recruiter high in SDO can make a more negative selection decisions toward individuals that they judge to be less attractive.

To summarise, individuals high in RWA express negative attitudes toward people who deviate from social norms (Asbrock et al., 2010; Cohrs et al., 2012; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; McFarland, 2010). Recruiters high in RWA are likely to judge job candidates low in physical attractiveness as people who are not the 'norm' and who, therefore, are not worthy of the job. SDO relates to prejudice against people who belong to groups judged as being lower in the social

pecking order (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). That includes people who are categorised as being less physically attractive (Asbrock et al., 2010). Therefore, recruiters high in SDO are likely to categorise job candidates as being high/low in the social order on the basis of their physical attractiveness and, following that, to feel prejudiced against those candidates who are 'low' in the social hierarchy.

### **The role of the recruiter's personality traits in activating "What is beautiful is good" stereotype**

The next part of this article reviews the influence of a recruiter's personality traits on the emergence of a physical attractiveness bias. The Big-Five theory/Five-Factor Model of personality provides the most widely used approach to personality (Goldberg, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 2008). Personality is structured into five personality factors, each of which varies on a continuum: extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and conscientiousness. Everyone possesses some level of each personality factor. What impact does a recruiter's personality have on their use of the "What is beautiful is good" stereotype when making a hiring decision? We argue that some personality traits are

associated with bias toward physically attractive job candidates because they are traits which involve a tendency to make decisions based on prejudice (Cohrs et al., 2012; Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007; Sibley & Duckitt, 2009).

*Openness to experience* is a personality trait linked to a low tendency towards being prejudiced. High scores in openness to experience are associated to open-mindedness, liberalism, non-conformity, a strong need for variety, change and innovation (Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007; McCrae & Costa, 2008). Such individuals are also critical of conforming to social, political or religious attitudes and are ready to re-evaluate it (Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007). Researchers have found that individuals with a higher degree of openness to experience tend to make decisions based on prejudice less often than other individuals (Cohrs et al., 2012; Ekehammar, Akrami, Gylje, & Zakrisson, 2004; Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007). Therefore, it seems likely that recruiters reporting high openness to experience may not strictly follow existing social norms about physical attractiveness and they do not have a high need for conformity to such norms by job candidates. As well, such recruiters are

likely to have broader ideas about “what is beautiful” because of their open-mindedness. Swami et al. (2011) found that people higher in openness to experience evaluated other individuals ranging in body size as attractive, compared to people low in openness to experience who judged individuals less favourably depending on their body shape.

In addition, the relation between personality and prejudice is likely to be mediated by ideological attitudes. Personality predisposes recruiters to certain views about the world (as a competitive place governed by a social hierarchy or as a dangerous place with threats and unpredictability) and, in turn, ideological attitudes. Personality can determine which ideological attitudes are developed by a recruiter, and so personality can be pivotal in determining the series of effects leading to prejudice and the tendency to make discriminative decisions (Sibley & Duckitt, 2009; Cohrs et al., 2012). As an example, recruiters who score low in openness to experience are likely to have highly developed RWA. People low in openness to experience have been found to prefer social conformity; they identify with existing social norms, values and structures, seek



the security provided by an authoritarian leader, which, in turn, increases dangerous-world beliefs supporting RWA and eventually prejudice (Cohrs et al., 2012; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; Ekehammar et al., 2004; Sibley & Duckitt, 2009).

A second personality factor relevant to the activation of the “What is beautiful is good” stereotype is *agreeableness*. This aspect of personality concerns sensitivity toward others, tolerance, altruism, attentiveness toward others and empathy (Berger, 2010; McCrae & Costa, 2008). As a result, people who score high on agreeableness are less likely to make judgments based on prejudice (Cohrs et al., 2012; Ekehammar et al., 2004). These people less often make judgments about others based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or mental disabilities. Ekehammar and Akrami’s (2007) analysed specific facets of agreeableness, which could explain why this trait is related to prejudice. They found that tender-mindedness, one of the indicators of agreeableness, was the strongest inverse predictor of prejudice among all other facets of agreeableness. The more tender-mindedness was associated with less prejudice. Therefore, recruiters high in agreeableness are less

likely to base their hiring decisions on prejudice than other recruiters.

Moreover, individuals low in agreeableness have limited concern for others and so they may experience regular social conflict between their own desires and the desires of others, making their competitive world view appear even worse (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). Furthermore, low agreeableness could be related to the tendency to justify social hierarchies. Consequently, agreeableness could be negatively related to SDO and then to prejudice (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; Ekehammar et al., 2004).

Researchers have also found a relation between the other three personality factors (neuroticism, conscientiousness, and extraversion) and prejudice (Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007; Ekehammar et al., 2004). However, it seems that these connections could be better explained by adding ideological attitudes as mediators (Cohrs et al., 2012; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). In a sense, we are arguing that the activation of the “What is beautiful is good” stereotype among recruiters depends on not just their personality but also their ideological attitudes.

Interestingly, *extraversion* is a personality trait which can be positively related to prejudice (Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007). Individuals with a high degree of extraversion are seen as friendly people who genuinely like other people and enjoy others' company (Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007; McCrae & Costa, 2008). Because of their level of outgoingness, highly extraverted people tend to seek attention, they speak their own mind, and they often seek to gain leadership in group contexts. This can predispose them to viewing the world as a competitive place (Sibley & Duckitt, 2009) where there is the need to compete for the position of receiving more attention and being a leader. As a result of seeking higher social positions, extraverts justify social hierarchies and they place authority in high esteem. This attitude makes extraverts at risk of high RWA and SDO, and further making them at risk of prejudiced decision-making based on these ideologies (Cohrs et al., 2012; Ekehammar et al., 2004). Noting these links, extraverted recruiters are likely to be particularly sensitive to candidates' position within the social order, such as based on their level of physical attractiveness, leading to more negative judgements against less attractive job candidates.

Higher scores in *neuroticism* are associated with low self-esteem and a pessimistic approach to the world (McCrae & Costa, 2008). This makes neurotic recruiters likely to evaluate both physically more attractive and physically less attractive candidates negatively. The physically attractive job candidates are likely to be evaluated by a neurotic recruiter as threatening to their own self-esteem, while the physically less attractive job candidates are evaluated as deserving of misfortune. From another point of view, neurotic individuals see the world as a place full of enemies and danger. Therefore, individuals high in neuroticism can be high in RWA and the tendency to make decisions based on prejudice (Ekehammar et al., 2004). As a result, neuroticism could be associated with making less favourable decisions about less attractive candidates.

The last personality trait, *conscientiousness*, is related to attentiveness, being hardworking and organised, being ambitiousness, preferring order, stability, structure and security (Berger, 2010; Uysal & Pohlmeier, 2010). Individuals high in conscientiousness support the existing social order and, in turn, are likely to be high in RWA and they can tend to make

decisions based on prejudice (Cohrs et al., 2012; Sibley & Duckitt, 2009). In addition, it can be argued that because physically more attractive individuals are perceived as having a higher status (Anderson et al., 2001; Senior et al., 2007), conscientiousness might be associated with value for authority and social order and mean bias towards physical attractive candidates in a bid to maintain that social order. Conversely conscientiousness is related to competence, dutifulness, and self-discipline (Berger, 2010). Therefore, a recruiter with high scores in conscientiousness could be more concerned with moral values and feelings of justice or what is right; in turn, recruiters who score high on these facets of conscientiousness are likely to be low on SDO, RWA and prejudice.

Overall, personality is one of the factors that determine whether an individual makes discriminative decisions. Therefore, personality can have a significant direct impact on the stereotype “What is beautiful is good” or an indirect impact (through ideological attitudes).

**The role of the recruiter’s socio-demographic characteristics in activating “What is beautiful is good” stereotype**

Research shows that socio-demographic factors such as employment experience, gender and age can shape judgements of job candidates based on their physical attractiveness (Foos & Clark, 2011; Marlowe et al., 1996; Senior et al., 2007). However, the results of these studies are contradictory.

A recruiter’s *employment experience* seems to be the most essential factor. It buffers the emergence of bias when making a hiring decision. Marlowe et al. (1996) presented the idea that physical attractiveness has a smaller impact on hiring decisions made by more experienced managers. Recruiters with limited experience tended to use inappropriate factors such as gender and appearance more often when deciding about the suitability of a job candidate. The explanation the authors put forward was that less experienced recruiters cannot make a decision based on more accurate and rational information about the fit between the person and the organization. Instead, less experienced recruiters rely on external cues or heuristics and stereotypes. Conversely, Hosoda et al. (2003) found that the physical attractiveness of a job candidate has the same effect on all recruiters regardless of their experience in

recruiting. They argued that the bias towards physically attractive candidates is so strong and influential that it cannot be mitigated by length of experience in recruiting. Therefore, we cannot unequivocally claim that lengthy experience as a recruiter makes the “What is beautiful is good” stereotype less likely to be activated. More research is needed to clarify that.

A second, important, socio-demographic variable is *gender*. In Senior et al. (2007) study participants were provided with photos of female/male more/less physically attractive faces and were asked to assign a high or low status work package for them and evaluate their physical attractiveness. The study found that males’ evaluated females as more physically attractive compared to other males. Moreover, women stereotyped physically attractive men as being more competent than physically attractive women, whereas men evaluated both attractive men and women as being more competent than unattractive ones. Senior and colleagues’ findings draw our attention to the psychology of mate selection, and from this we can extrapolate that male recruiters stereotype physically attractive female job candidates for different reasons than

female recruiters. Based on literature about mate selection, men tend to focus more on aspects of women’s physical attractiveness which signals good health and the ability to produce healthy offspring. Women, on the other hand, relate physical attractiveness to competence because this trait is extremely important for them (e.g., in showing a man’s ability to provide resource security for her and her offspring; Langlois et al., 2000; Workman & Reader, 2004). Hence, female recruiters are likely to evaluate physically attractive men as better candidates for a job because they stereotype their level of competence. For men, the stereotype “What is beautiful is good” is likely to apply when it comes to judging women’s attractiveness as potential mates. In addition, evolutionary indicators of social power or dominance, such as male height and girth could shape both male and female recruiters’ judgements (Senior et al., 2007).

Additionally, the extent to which the job in question is a stereotypically masculine or feminine job role could determine how and to what extent physical attractiveness impacts on a hiring decision. For instance, physical attractiveness which involves strong feminine characteristics

can have negative consequences for female candidates applying for a stereotypically masculine job (Desrumaux et al., 2009). In fact, it could be that femininity and masculinity is automatically associated with physical attractiveness, and so job candidates who fit common ideals of beauty are invariably assumed to be highly feminine or masculine (depending on their gender). Drogosz and Levy (1996) studied the relations among physical attractiveness, gender, evaluation of job performance and masculinity/femininity. In this study participants were given photographs of employees as well as some job performance reviews. Their findings indicate that physically attractive women tend to be perceived as being very feminine and physically attractive men as very masculine. Therefore, when such candidates apply for jobs which are stereotyped as being the 'domain' of the opposite sex (e.g., men applying for a job in nursing, or women applying for a building job), there is the risk of recruiters stereotyping their 'unsuitability' for the job based on their physical appearance and presumed masculinity or femininity.

Previous research does not give a straightforward answer about the role of a recruiter's age and its influence on the

activation of the stereotype that "What is beautiful is good". Based on expertise theory (Foos & Clark, 2011), experience of physical attractiveness increases with age. The theory would lead us to argue that the older a recruiter is, the more faces they have come across, and the wider is their idea of what counts as attractive. Therefore, young recruiters could have a much narrower view of what makes a person physically attractive. Looking from this perspective, young recruiters are at greater risk of expressing a bias towards candidates who are physically attractive in a conventional sense (e.g., based on their youth, weight, clothing style), compared to older recruiters. When it comes to recruiters' age, another important factor that should be considered is the similarity between the recruiter's and the job candidate's age. Recruiters could judge candidates of the same age group as the most attractive (Foos & Clark, 2001) whereas, for older recruiters, attractiveness norms and standards will have changed over time. At the same time, older interviewers could perceive younger candidates as less attractive because of different beauty standards they hold within their own age group. This could be especially important considering the job candidate's 'baby face' features (e.g., face shape, eye size,

jaw line, vocal pitch) and the 'youthfulness' of their clothing and accessories.

In summary, socio-demographic characteristics seem to be significant factors that shape perception and judgment of other individuals and, in turn, shape the activation of the stereotype that "What is beautiful is good" during the selection process.

### **The role of the recruiters' physical attractiveness in activating "What is beautiful is good" stereotype**

In this section of our article, we review the effect on hiring decisions of a similarity between a recruiter's attractiveness and the job candidate's attractiveness. There are at least three possible scenarios during a selection process involving a recruiter and a candidate: a) the candidate is more physically attractive than the recruiter; b) the recruiter is more physically attractive than the candidate; and c) the recruiter's and applicant's physical attractiveness levels are similar.

The stereotype that "What is beautiful is good" involves the belief that physically attractive individuals possess positive characteristics such as confidence, sociability, better communication skills, and charm (Desrumaux et al., 2009;

Langlois et al., 2000). Large contrasts between the recruiter's and candidate's attractiveness levels can make the candidate appear even more attractive. Haas and Gregory's (2005) findings support this idea by showing that less physically attractive women accommodated their behaviour to more attractive ones as they were seen as having more positive characteristics, such as more influence and a higher status.

From another perspective, if the candidate presents scenario a), the recruiter could perceive him or her as a threat. A physically attractive candidate is perceived as being someone who is highly confident and in control of a situation (Andreoletti, Zebrowitz, & Lachman, 2001; Judge, Hurst, & Simon, 2009; Haas & Gregory, 2005; Mobious & Rosenblat, 2006). In the hiring process, the recruiter holds the power of decision-making and so a more physically attractive job candidate presents a threat to the status that a recruiter holds in this situation (Agthe et al., 2011). This perceived threat is a consequence of social comparison: when people compare themselves with more physically attractive people, their own self-perception can be negatively affected (Thornton & Maurice, 1999). That means

that being with more physically attractive individuals can lead to an increase in social anxiety and it could negatively affect self-esteem (Thornton & Maurice, 1999; Trampe, Stapel, & Siero, 2007). Consequently, job candidates who are more physically attractive than the recruiter could be evaluated more negatively because of the threat they present to the recruiter's self-esteem.

It is important to note that gender difference presents a proviso to the above effects. Evidence from Agthe et al. (2011) helps to clarify that we need to consider the role of gender in predicting what is likely to happen in scenario a). Agthe and colleagues found that a recruiter's positive bias towards a physically attractive job candidate emerged only when the candidate was from the opposite sex. When the judgment involved a candidate of the same sex, a more physically attractive candidate was stereotyped as having *negative* characteristics. Agthe and colleagues argue that individuals tend to avoid social connections with more physically attractive people of the same sex because they are perceived as a threat. However, sexual orientation or political beliefs (e.g., feminist attitudes) can produce different sorts of gender

effects when recruiters are judging candidates – however this needs to be explored with further research.

If the scenario in play is scenario b), when the recruiter evaluates him or herself as being more attractive than the candidate, the “What is beautiful is good” stereotype is likely to be activated. As Mulford, Orbell, Shatto, and Stockard (1998) propose, physically attractive individuals tend to cooperate with other physically attractive individuals and evaluate them as possessing more positive characteristics. Therefore, the recruiter is likely to remain confident about his/her own appearance and not perceive the candidate as a threat to self-esteem. This process is likely to be true even in scenario c) when the recruiter/candidate are both high in physical attractiveness.

However, we must note that physical attractiveness runs along a continuum. In general, the bigger the difference in physical attractiveness between two individuals, the stronger is the influence of physical appearance on decision-making (Haas & Gregory, 2005). Therefore, if there is just a slight difference between the recruiter's and applicant's physical attractiveness, a recruiter's physical attractiveness should

not have significant impact on activation of the stereotype “What is beautiful is good”.

## Conclusion

The bias towards physically attractive people is well documented within the scientific literature but, until now, little attention has been given to the recruiter’s characteristics. This article is one of the first to systematically review why and how a recruiter’s personal characteristics will influence the activation of the stereotype “What is beautiful is good” during the selection process. Based on the literature discussed and possible relations between phenomena analysed, we draw three main conclusions:

1. Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO) are two ideological attitudes related to general prejudice. A recruiter holding strong RWA and/or SDO ideologies are likely to use the stereotype “What is beautiful is good” frequently and more than other recruiters.
2. Recruiters highly open to experience and/or highly agreeable use the stereotype “What is beautiful is good” less than recruiters with different levels of those personality traits.

Recruiters high in extraversion and/or neuroticism are more likely to hold RWA and SDO ideological attitudes than other recruiters, and they are more at risk of using the stereotype “What is beautiful is good”. They tend to judge candidates based on their physical attractiveness more often and to assign negative traits to job candidates low on physical attractiveness. However, the relation between conscientiousness and the activation of the stereotype “What is beautiful is good” remains unclear.

3. The impact of a recruiter’s employment, age, gender experience, and physical attractiveness is complex. A recruiter’s experience in hiring does not necessarily make them immune to the activation of the “What is beautiful is good” stereotype. Age could be influential factor considering the difference between the recruiter’s and the job candidate’s age. Gender can moderate the activation of the stereotype, depending on the difference between a recruiter’s and a candidate’s level of attractiveness. Where a candidate is more physically attractive than the recruiter, gender can influence the “What is beautiful is good” stereotype being applied only



when the candidate is of the opposite sex. Where a recruiter perceives him/herself as high in physical attractiveness, those gender effects tend not to occur. In that instance, the recruiter is likely to apply the “What is beautiful is good” stereotype to evaluate same-sex and opposite-sex job candidates positively and, subsequently, to rate them as being suitable for the job. Conversely, if a recruiter considers his/her own physical attractiveness to be low, a same-sex job candidate can be perceived as a threat to the higher status the recruiter holds within the interaction and therefore associate the candidate’s attractiveness with negative characteristics.

### **Practical implications for Human Resource specialists**

- Recruiters need to be made consciously aware about the social cognition of stereotyping. Awareness of own existing biases can help to reduce the activation of stereotypes when it comes to evaluating others. Therefore, recruiters should be encouraged to reflect on their private beliefs about people who are high or low on physical attractiveness. Recruiters should also be given the opportunity to learn about the role of

their own personal characteristics in determining the cognitive activation of physical attractiveness stereotypes while other characteristics can buffer the stereotype.

- In some countries, job candidates are asked to add a picture to their application or curriculum vitae. In any country, recruiters tend to Google job applicants and, where a photo is available on the candidate’s personal web profile, the photo can form a basis for stereotyping. The activation of the “What is beautiful is good” stereotype can disadvantage candidates from the earliest stages of the selection process, denying them a place in the shortlist. It is seriously important for hiring teams to establish a protocol about the acceptability of Google-searching job candidates at least before they reach the interview shortlist. Even better than that, organizations should make job applicants’ names strictly confidential and unknown to all involved in the recruitment decision-making; held by an independent party. Candidates’ names can be revealed when making the interview stage in the hiring decision. Doing anything to keep physical appearance *out* of the

decision-making process (e.g., using a number to identify applicants) will help recruitment teams make more objective and fair decisions about who to shortlist.

- Finally, we recommend that HR specialists make use of psychometric testing to measure the ideological attitudes of would-be recruiters and their personality traits. Recruiters' high/low scores on certain ideological attitudes and personality traits, unfortunately, could be related to serious risk of expressing bias towards physically attractive job candidates. The solution is, of course, not to exclude such recruiters from the selection process but to use strategies to minimise bias (such as using numbers to identify candidates). It is important that HR specialists should help recruiters understand the risks of stereotyping (see point 1). Further, it is important to consider the composition of recruitment teams, based on the psychometric test scores of recruiters within it, and to ensure there is balance in recruiters' personalities and ideological attitudes. Finally, recruitment teams should be made accountable for their decision-making and there should be an audit

of the correspondence between recruiters' characteristics and their hiring decisions.

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