

# 'Ugly' finding: Unattractive workers suffer more

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A study by Brent Scott, business scholar at Michigan State University, suggests unattractive workers are more likely to be bullied in the workplace. Credit: Michigan State University

People who are considered unattractive are more likely to be belittled and bullied in the workplace, according to a first-of-its-kind study led by a Michigan State University business scholar.

"Frankly, it's an ugly finding," said Brent Scott, associate professor of management and lead investigator on the study. "Although we like to think we're professional and mature in the workplace, it can be just like high school in many ways."

While plenty of research has found that attractive students tend to be more popular in school, the study is the first to link attractiveness to cruelty in the workplace. The results appear in the research journal *Human Performance*.

The researchers surveyed 114 workers at a health care facility in the southeastern United States. The workers were asked how often their co-workers engaged in cruel behavior toward them (which included saying hurtful things, acting rudely and making fun of them).

People who didn't know the [study participants](#) judged their attractiveness from [digital photos](#).

The unattractive workers were treated much more harshly than [attractive](#) employees even when other key factors were taken into account, including age, gender and how long they had worked at the health care facility.

The researchers also collected information on how agreeable or friendly the workers were, based on [questionnaires](#) completed by their spouses, partners or good friends. The study found that disagreeable workers, like unattractive employees, were treated more harshly than their co-workers.

"Our findings revealed that both [personality](#) and appearance matter,"

Scott said.

Knowing the potential targets of hurtful behavior could help managers monitor susceptible employees to prevent them from becoming victims or to provide counseling and social support if prevention attempts fail, he said.

Provided by Michigan State University

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