

Insights, News & Events

“THE BEAUTY BIAS” BRINGS TO LIGHT PHYSICAL DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE

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Hypothetically speaking, if Jennifer Aniston was competing against Susan Boyle for an office job and had the exact same resume, who would be more likely to score gig? And what if Aniston had less experience than musically-gifted but regular-looking Boyle?

According to “The Beauty Bias,” written by Stanford law professor Deborah Rhode, nearly 60 percent of hiring managers would take Aniston — experience or not. This study brings to light a bigger issue: different types of physical discrimination based on a person’s looks.

And it isn’t simply an issue among women. “The Beauty Bias” also reports that over the course of a handsome man’s lifetime, he will on average make \$250,000 more than his less-attractive male co-workers. Tall counts, too, with taller people making more than \$700 more per year than those of average height.

One great example of our natural bias to beauty – even in males – is the infamous Richard Nixon/John F. Kennedy presidential debate in the 1960s. Radio listeners, who couldn’t see the handsome, tan Kennedy and sweating, older, shorter Nixon, were sure Nixon had won the debate. However, audiences who viewed the debate on their televisions were positive Kennedy was the victor.

But can this really be seeping into our offices? Yes. Approximately 12 to 14 percent of workers say they’ve suffered some sort of appearance-based discrimination on the job. There are some out there, however, who are making

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a very convincing case that this sort of physical discrimination has serious and wide-spread consequences — and that there should be a way to fight back.

Most often, sex discrimination and age discrimination are issues in these types of lawsuits, especially if the potential or current employee can show he/she was overlooked for a job or promotion by a hiring manager or business specifically seeking a young, attractive individual of a specific sex. Some take it further, arguing that what may be construed as “unattractiveness” is a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

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