

[DOI: 10.20472/IAC.2018.040.056](https://doi.org/10.20472/IAC.2018.040.056)

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JUDGING ETHICAL BEHAVIOR IN THE WORKPLACE: THE ROLE OF ATTRACTIVENESS AND GENDER

Abstract:

One of the most challenging areas for employees and managers is dealing with shades of gray related to ethical behaviors. The ability to evaluate unethical behavior can differ from person to person and is vulnerable to the influences of unrelated attributions. In the current study, we investigated the role of physical attractiveness and gender in judging severity of unethical workplace behavior. Scenarios with unethical behavioral dilemmas were displayed to 4,602 subjects in different versions accompanied with images. Our findings show that "gray area" behavior was evaluated with more severity if conducted by a plain-looking employee than an attractive one. When comparing genders, the same action was perceived as more ethical if performed by male employees. We explore a number of explanations for this discrimination based on the psychological literature.

Keywords:

business ethics, experiment, gender, beauty

JEL Classification: C91, M10