

# How Do We Pick Leaders? The Beauty Bias and Leader Emergence

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Dr. Gary Thurgood

Whether it's the leader of a work team or the CEO of a large corporation, people chosen to leadership roles have a great impact on the organizations that they lead. So, the characteristics that are used to judge whether a person is fit (or not) for a leadership role should be based on things that are directly connected to their ability to be successful in those roles, right?

Well, that's mostly true. Attributes such as one's intelligence, prior experience, and relevant personality traits do matter in leadership selection. However, that's not the whole story. Leader selection can also be influenced by characteristics that have little to no connection to one's ability to actually be successful in a leadership position.

Recent research by Dr. Gary Thurgood focuses on one of these "biases" that is known to affect human beings' judgements of others generally, which is the potential leader's physical attractiveness. In a recent meta-analysis published in the *Journal of Management*, Dr. Thurgood and his co-authors examine how prevalent and pervasive the problem of the "beauty bias" exists in leader selection decisions.

They find that one's attractiveness does have some impact on who emerges into leadership roles and this bias occurs quite consistently regardless of leadership level, career stage, and even national culture. Perhaps more surprisingly, they also found that this problem affects men and women relatively equally, both as targets of this bias, but also as perpetrators of it when making judgements of others as well. They conclude by offering several strategies that organizations can use to mitigate the influence of this "beauty bias" when making leader selection decisions.

Read the full study here:

**The beauty bias and leader emergence: A theoretical integration, extension, and meta-analysis.**

Courtright, Thurgood, Liao, Morgan, & Wang (2025)

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