

Physical Attractiveness as a Privilege

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Abstract

Physical attractiveness refers to the human preferences of the physical looks and appearances of other individuals, especially in terms of facial features and areas of the body. It is an established fact that physical attractiveness creates unjust privileges to those who are considered the social norm and common perception of “beauty”. The term beauty and attractiveness itself are subjective terms, and are continuously changing as society develops. The definition of what is deemed as physically attractive has always been a broad concept, and what one individual considers as attractive may not be attractive to another. In this study, we analyze the standard of beauty and attractiveness (in the perception of society and individuals), as well as the reasons behind the constant attempts of individuals to meet the social norm of beauty, and the effects of physical attractiveness on social well-being.

Keywords

Physical attractiveness; Beauty; Social appearance.

1. Introduction

Throughout history, it has been denoted that the social norm of “beauty” can bring about many unearned advantages for both men and women. However, within the past decade, the concept of “attractiveness privilege” started to surface the mass media. Psychologists, scientists, sociologists and researches have previously studied this phenomenon, how it affects the social status of an individual (Frevert and Walker, 2014), its influences on employment, work, and pay (Burda, Hamermesh and Weil, 2012), effects of the standard of beauty on the self and body esteem of women (Irving, 1990), the relationship between physical attractiveness and crime (Sigall and Ostrove, 1975), children’s perceptions of attractiveness (Rennels and Langlois, 2014), and physical attractiveness and achievement and social well-being (Umberson and Hughes, 1987).

By definition, physical attractiveness refers to human preferences of the physical looks of others, particularly with indication to facial features and areas of the body (Ellis, Farrington and Hoskin, 2019). Existing studies and research have shown that people generally have common perceptions that physical attractiveness has stereotyped traits and typically links these traits to the status quo of “beauty”. Many researches that involve measuring the stereotypical “physical attractiveness” proceeds by having subjects evaluate stimulus persons along sets of trait dimensions (Kalick, 1988). In one study, newborn infants (who have little to no knowledge about surroundings or beauty standards) were shown numerous facial images. Findings in this case shows that the infants preserve a much more sustained focus and/or smiles more often when they are shown facial photographs that adults previously rated highest in terms of physical attractiveness (Rennels and Langlois, 2014). Other studies include yearbook photos being matched with stimulus photos that represents the categories of status:

high achieved, high ascribed, low achieved, and low ascribed. Achieved status being earned or chosen and reflects a person's skills, ability and efforts, while ascribed status is not earned, but rather characters one is born with and has no control over. (Sociology: Achieved Status Versus Ascribed Status, 2021) Results from the study found that more attractive photos were matched with higher status, and was stronger for ascribed status rather than achieved status. It was a consistent trend for subjects to link high ascribed status descriptions to the more attractive photos (Kalick, 1988).

It is true that people tend to form their interpretations of another individual based on their race, sex, and attractiveness. The physical attractiveness stereotype is the perception that physically attractive individuals are more intelligent, talented, confident, honest and has higher levels of social well-being than those who are less "attractive". This results in more attractive persons having more persuasiveness, and advantages in areas such as education, relationships, work, and remuneration. These are often due to performance expectations which are correlated to attractiveness (Frevert and Walker, 2014).

Many of the above-mentioned research and studies focused on the effects of "physical attractiveness" on different aspects of life, however, none have mentioned what the standard for being attractive is. What does society consider as being attractive or unattractive, are there specific facial structures and requirements for appearances to meet this standard? For this research, I wish to investigate the socially acceptable standards of what is considered as "attractive" (individuals and society's perception of beauty), the definition of the term "privilege" (i.e., what it means for someone to be privileged), and most importantly, to expand the literature on the relationship between being attractive and the types of privileges and opportunities that comes along with it, and how that affects whether an individual receives unjust privilege of being more attractive. I will analyze the reasons behind the constant attempts of individuals to meet the social norm of beauty, as well as the effects of physical attractiveness on social well-being and other relevant areas of life.

2. Research Method

In this study, I mainly adopted the following research methods:

1. Literature research method: Literature research method mainly refers to the method of collecting, identifying and sorting out literature, and forming a scientific understanding of facts through literature research.
2. Questionnaire survey method: Questionnaire survey method mainly refers to the method of sending questionnaires to others to obtain and integrate information.

By using a literature survey, I hope to capture the price women have paid for physical attractiveness

By using a questionnaire, I hope to understand the inequities caused by physical attractiveness in my work and life, so as to clarify why we all want to be physically attractive.

3. Literature Investigation Method

[Beauty is the Beast.]

1. The value of beauty depends in part on the high cost of achieving it. These costs may be physical, time, financial, or psychological. The physical costs range from the pains of ancient beauty rituals like foot binding, tattooing, nose and ear piercing to more modern rituals like wearing pointy heels and skinny jeans. Adverse side effects: Beauty rituals are often disastrous for a woman's health. Tattoos and ear piercing with unhygienic tools can lead to serious and sometimes fatal infections. Many women have been poisoned with toxic chemicals in cosmetics

(e.g., ceramics, arsenic, benzene, petroleum) and have died from the use of unsafe weight loss products such as Rainbow Pill and liquid protein (Schwartz, 1986).

2. It takes a lot of money to achieve the ideal beauty. Expensive cosmetics (such as cosmetics, moisturizers, hair dyes and hair straighteners) are the most popular and are considered to be the most effective even though they contain the same ingredients as those of cheaper products (Lakoff & Scherr, 1984).

3. Plastic surgery has become so accepted and widespread that, although it costs quite a lot, surgeons advertise their services on TV. Not surprisingly, most plastic surgery patients are female (Hamburg, 1988)

4. The beauty ritual is a time-consuming activity. The joke about how long it takes a woman to get ready for a date depends on the extra tasks a woman does when getting dressed. It takes some time to pluck your eyebrows, shave your legs, manicure, put on makeup and fix your hair. Women's wear is more complex than men's and uses more accessories.

5. The psychological effects of the perfectionist female body include extreme happiness, confusion, pain, and insecurity. Women often believe that if they only have perfect appearance, their life will be very happy; They believe that unhappiness is caused by the body.

6. Social pressure to be thin can be directly related to the increased incidence of anorexia and bulimia among women (Bloom. Berg, 1988) Kasky, 1986). At least 1 million Americans currently suffer from anorexic neurosis, 95 percent of them women. Of these, 60,000 to 150,000 will die as a result of obsession (Schwartz, 1986).

7. Sport has lost its status as a pleasurable activity and has become yet another way for women to manipulate their bodies, another tool of narcissistic self-torture.

8. It is clear that women with obvious defects will never be judged as having achieved "perfection". About the encase with towel the head pretending with blond hair black young routine, and Alice Walker (Alice Walker) about psychological adjustment after eye injuries (1990), the article led to "hide" the development of scar tissue, for women in the pain which is unable to achieve cosmetic standard experienced provides examples of bitterness

9. The overemphasis on the female external self makes it difficult for us to appreciate our inner self (Cano, 1985). Constant efforts to live up to ideals of beauty can lead to high stress and chronic anxiety. Failing to live up to the ideal of beauty can lead to frustration, low self-worth and feelings of inadequacy in women, whose sense of self is based on how they look. Efforts to increase attractiveness may also lead to higher rates of depression among women.

10. When these women lose their beauty as a result of illness or accident, they often become depressed, may find it difficult to function socially and believe that their entire identity is under threat.

11. In a classic study called "What is beautiful, it is good." psychologists Kenneth Dion, Alan Burscheid and Elaine Hatfield (Dion, Burscheid, West, 1972) asked college students to rate photos of strangers based on a variety of personal characteristics. People who were rated as attractive were also more likely than those who were rated as unattractive to be smart, kind, happy, flexible, funny, confident, sexy, confident, strong, kind, stable, modest, frank and successful. Attractive children were rated more highly by teachers for a variety of positive traits, including intelligence and social skills, and attractive infants were hugged and kissed more often than unattractive infants (Burscheid and West, 1974).

12. Attractive people are more leniently punished for social transgressions (Dion, 1972; Randy Aronson, 1969), Attractive women are more often sought out in social situations (Wahster, Aronson, Abrahams, Rotman, 1966; Rees, Nezleck, and Wheeler, 1980)

13. Moreover, since unattractive people are more severely punished for social transgressions and are less sought after by social partners, there may be real consequences to working in pursuit of the ideal of beauty. TV newswoman Kristen Kraft made the news herself when she

was fired for being too old and unattractive. Obese women are discriminated against in a number of cases, including employment and promotion (Larkin and Pine, 1979; Roseblum, Miller, Gobut, 1988) and University Admission (Canning and Mair, 1966). Obese people may even have difficulty finding a place to live: Lambros Carris (1977) found that landlords were less likely to rent obese people. Even doctors view their patients negatively (Maddox and Lidman, 1969)

14. There is considerable evidence that women's attraction is more severe than men's. Kristen Kraft was fired, but David Brinkley and Willard Scott continued to work on major television news shows; Their abilities were thought to be unaffected by age or attractiveness. Several studies (Adams and Houston, 1975; Berman, O' South, Freud, 1981; Germany, Za_Lenski, Clark, 1986; Wernick Manaster (1984) asked participants to rate the attractiveness of photos of people of different ages, and found that while attractiveness ratings declined with age for both men and women, the rate of decline was higher for women. In a review of research on obesity stigma, Esther Rosblum (1992) concluded that the obesity industry, combined with Western attitudes about weight and obesity, causes more pain and problems for women than men.

[Pair-Bonded Relationships and Romantic Alternatives: Toward an Integration of Evolutionary and Relationship Science Perspectives]

15. Whereas research in the evolutionary tradition frequently emphasizes ways in which individuals are motivated to seek out their own reproductive interests at the expense of their partners (e.g., by surreptitiously having sex with attractive alternatives).

16. These two kinds of mate preference have been widely concerned, because some evolutionists predict that men should be more eager to mate's attractiveness than women, and women should be more eager to mate's income prospects than men (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Perusse, 1994).

[Physical Attractiveness and Subjective Well-Being]

17. Three studies were conducted to determine whether physical attractiveness (PAT) is related to subjective well-being (SWB). In the first study (N=221), unselected students were photographed and videotaped. In the second study (N=131), participants were selected on the basis of extremes in PAT, and in the third study (N=155), participants were preselected for extreme scores on SWB. Correlations between SWB and PAT varied from .03 to .33. In Study 1 the mean correlation between PAT and SWB was .13. When appearance enhancers (hair, clothing, and jewelry) were covered or removed in Studies 2 and 3, the correlation between PAT and SWB dropped, suggesting that part of the SWB-PAT relation might be due to happier people doing more to enhance their beauty. The impact of PAT on SWB may be mitigated by the fact that others agree on a target's PAT at only modest levels. It was found that self-perceptions of PAT were correlated with both one's objective PAT and one's SWB.

[Lee Ellis, ... Anthony W. Hoskin, in Handbook of Crime Correlates (Second Edition), 2019]

18. There is evidence that at least part of the attractiveness rating is not understood, and that evidence comes from slides that show a large number of facial images to newborn babies (apparently, these babies have not yet learned any specific aesthetic culture standards). These studies have shown that infants maintain more sustained attention and / or smile more often when they see the facial pictures that adults rate most in terms of physical attractiveness (Langlois et al., 1990; Rennels & verba, 2017).

[Measuring the Physical in Physical Attractiveness. Quasi-Experiments on the Sociobiology of Female Facial Beauty, Cunningham]

19. Investigated, in 2 quasi-experiments, the relation between specific adult female facial features and the attraction, attribution, and altruistic responses of adult males. Precise measurements were obtained of the relative size of 24 facial features in an international sample of photographs of 50 females. 75 undergraduate males provided ratings of the attractiveness of

each of the females. Positively correlated with attractiveness ratings were the neonate features of large eyes, small nose, and small chin; the maturity features of prominent cheekbones and narrow cheeks; and the expressive features of high eyebrows, large pupils, and large smile. A 2nd study asked males to rate the personal characteristics of 16 previously measured females. The males were also asked to indicate the females for whom they would be most inclined to perform altruistic behaviors and to select for dating, sexual behavior, and child-rearing. The 2nd study replicated the correlations of feature measurements with attractiveness. Facial features also predicted personality attributions, altruistic inclinations, and reproductive interest.

4. Questionnaire Survey Method

The questionnaire I sent out mainly asked the respondents whether they had encountered or experienced unfair events caused by physical attractiveness.

Table 1. Have you ever encountered unfairness in your work or study environment due to your appearance [single choice]

Options	Subtotal	proportion
Yes	29	43.94%
No	26	39.39%
I didn't notice	11	16.67%
Number of valid persons to fill in this question	66	

Table 2. Have you ever been treated unfairly in your life because of your appearance [single choice]

Options	Subtotal	proportion
Yes	25	37.88%
No	33	50%
I didn't notice	8	12.12%
Number of valid persons to fill in this question	66	

Among the 66 people who filled in the questionnaire, 29 had ever met with unfair events and 25 had ever experienced unfair events caused by attractiveness.

Among them, most of those who choose to fill in the reasons indicate that they think that physical attractiveness can make people have a good impression at the beginning. Whether in the interview or in the competition for promotion opportunities, people with physical

attractiveness have a congenital advantage. When doing business, the other party is more willing to deal with good-looking people. As a student, good appearance is more likely to be favored by teachers. Even when asking for directions, a person with a better appearance can be treated more warmly. Undoubtedly, in the pursuit of a partner, physical attractiveness is a lethal weapon.

5. Conclusion

In the above literature, we can learn that in order to maintain their physical attractiveness, women can accept the physical pain, economic sacrifice and waste of time. They forced themselves to eat less, drink less and keep fit, which even led to some deaths. However, if they don't have enough physical attractiveness, they will also feel pain in their heart. Not only in emotional life, but also feel the instability of social status.

So why is physical attractiveness so attractive that women pursue it so much? In my opinion, physical attractiveness can give people a good first impression. As mentioned in fragment 11 of the literature, only one person's photos can judge what kind of quality he has. It is obvious that physical attractiveness plays a role. Because of this, attractive appearance can bring convenience in life that others don't have, such as reducing punishment, getting a job more easily and not losing a job easily. There have been some scandals in the workplace about attractive female subordinates and male supervisors. It also gives women subordinates (in an improper way) opportunities for promotion. In contrast, unattractive people are easily forced to give way to more attractive people, whether in promotion or interview. Even as fragment 13 of the literature says, we have to be treated negatively everywhere in our life. In addition, one of the main reasons is that women with greater attractiveness are more dominant in competing for spouses.

With high attractiveness, it opens a VIP channel for people: to become a star. Ding Zhen, the star of the recent fire, has attracted countless fans almost by his face. For people, this is undoubtedly the fastest and most convenient way to get fame and wealth. In front of the star's high income, surgery and cosmetics are nothing at all.

Society seems to have higher demands on women's appearance than men's. As mentioned in literature 14, studies have shown that men's attractiveness scores decline faster with age than women's. Moreover, it is possible that, as predicted in literature 16, men should be more eager for their partner's attractiveness than women, while women should be more eager for their partner's income prospects than men. In our life, it seems that few people comment on an obese man, but many people are dissatisfied with an obese woman. In the virtual anchor industry, the anchor is usually required not to show the real face. However, the criticism of a male virtual anchor when showing his true face cannot be compared with that of a female virtual anchor when showing her true face. On the premise that audiences don't think they have great physical attractiveness, female virtual anchors have a bigger gap in their hearts, because they are usually imagined as beautiful women. These are still the unfairness hidden under the social appearance. However, before we infer that social development requires this, is it possible that we are born with such a view? We can learn from fragment 18 that even infants seem to prefer highly attractive faces. Whether the pursuit of beauty has existed in our collective subconsciousness, and whether the unfairness caused by these factors has existed at the beginning of human birth and cannot be eliminated in the future? Even if there is such a possibility, we cannot give up eliminating these inequities. The beauty of mind should replace the beauty of appearance to become the mainstream. In addition, people should also think about a question: Is it really worth sacrificing happiness for the sake of beauty?

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