The Dark Side of Being Pretty[1]

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Abstract

Assessment of social and economic advantages possessed by individuals considered physically attractive is a common research theme in the social science literature. Since the early 1960s, researchers have reported attractive women and handsome men have advantages related to procuring jobs with higher salaries, obtaining better seating at restaurants, and experiencing a generally higher level of cordiality than less attractive counterparts. Informal observations of high stress levels among extremely attractive professional women, however, prompted exploration of a potential "dark side" to being pretty. A focus group was used to determine if physically attractive women face discrimination. Goffman's work was employed framework for sample collection. Findings suggest that these women experience cognitive dissonance and its emotional consequences. Social services tend to be dominated by women and social work mentors need to be aware of this as a potential concern that may arise for some mentees.

Keywords: lookism, cognitive dissonance, discrimination, focus group, *Schadenfreude*

The Dark Side of Being Pretty

Little has been published on the "dark side" of being pretty until recently, although social science literature addresses the advantages of attractiveness in-depth. Since the early 1960s, studies have reported that individuals considered attractive tend to benefit from that perception (e.g., Berscheid & Walster, 1978; Dion, Bersheid & Walster, 1972; Gurung & Chrouser, 2007; Luoh & Tsaur, 2009; Rhode, 2010). The dearth of research on the dark side of attractiveness for women, coupled with high stress levels repeatedly observed by the authors among extremely attractive women, provided the rationale for this institutional review board approved qualitative study.

The research question addressed was: Do women who are physically attractive face stigma and discrimination because of their looks? Goffman's (1959) work was employed as a broad frame of reference to use for sample collection. This article provides an overview of research literature and describes the current United States of America (USA) socio-cultural context in this area. It then presents the study's theoretical framework, focus group methodology, findings, and implications. The catalyst for this research emerged from a student named Kim (pseudonym) who graduated with a 4.0 average and in addition to being exceptionally bright, she was exceptionally pretty. When Kim entered a room, everyone (male and female) would look at her. This caused her serious social problems. Specifically, because of her physical appearance she was treated as if she was "stupid."

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Kim wanted to be a lawyer and came to her academic advisor during her sophomore year. He suggested she consider an internship at a law office. She enthusiastically supported the idea and made the arrangements. About half-way through the semester, she again met with her advisor and said that she had decided not to apply to law school. During the conversation, she slowly unfolded a description of treatment she received from the law office staff (both male and female) that included ridicule.

She was appalled and shocked to learn that she was subjected to this within a professional setting. She said "if that's what lawyers are like, I don't want to be one." Her advisor responded "you cannot let that type of experience destroy your dreams." Kim was an honor student and wrote a senior thesis, which consisted of a detailed analysis of the problems that female lawyers face in a male dominated profession. After graduation, she decided to pursue law school despite her internship experience, and completed law school with a environmental law specialty. Her advisor spoke to her several years ago. At that time, Kim reported being delighted with her decision to study law.

Definitions, Background, and the Literature

Lookism is defined as "Prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of appearance" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015). The term refers to stereotypes generated by beliefs about what is attractive in humans, and discrimination (either preferential or disadvantageous) meted out to physically attractive people; the concept recognizes that beliefs about what constitutes attractiveness differ through time and across cultural norms. Although not always included in lists of "isms," lookism has been in the American lexicon since the 1970s (e.g., Cook, 1978; Dibsie, 1985; Rowan, 1993). It is well documented in the experience of people in American society: Kuran and McCaffery (2004) found that in the "United States there currently exists a significant amount of discrimination on the basis of physical appearance, economic status, and ethnicity, and in that order" (p. 723).

Recently, a number of high profile lawsuits have related to being "too pretty" for a job. Melissa Nelson, for example, was fired as a dental assistant because her employer was attracted to her and was concerned about the effect of this attraction on his marriage (Strass, 2013). Debralee Lorenzana, a Citibank employee who was criticized for her attractive appearance, was moved from one bank to another, and lost her job following the transfer (Dwoskin, 2010). And Lauren Odes, an ex-employee of a New York lingerie company, filed a complaint with the New York Office of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in 2012, claiming that company owners fired her for being too attractive and wearing provocative clothing (Francescani, 2012). While the morality and ethics of discrimination based on appearance is controversial, Cavico, Muffler, and Mujtaba (2012) make it clear that it is legal to discriminate, as long as this discrimination is not used as a proxy to exclude members of a protected class.

It is not difficult to find literature about the advantages of being attractive. For millennia, the words of Syrus, "A fair exterior is a silent recommendation" (Publilius Syrus, circa 42 BC) have found support in a wide variety of cultural artifacts. The "what is beautiful is good" stereotype has been frequently reinforced (Dion, Bersheid, & Walster, 1972). Considerable evidence suggests that attractiveness affects the assumptions made about a person's attributes and expected overall life outcomes. This literature is found in many different disciplines including law (Desir, 2010), sociology (Johnson & Gurung, 2011), business management (Cavico, Muffler, & Mujtaba, 2012), philosophy (Nussbaum, 1995; Tietje & Cresap 2005), political science (Hart, Ottati, & Krumdick, 2011), and psychology (Braun, Peus, & Frey, 2012; Heilman & Haynes, 2005). Recently, Hakim (2010) advanced the theory of erotic capital as a fourth asset that is different from the other kinds of capital (i.e., economic, social, and cultural), and described erotic capital as not only essential for the understanding of sexual relationships but reaching beyond such relationships. The concept is also:

… important for understanding social processes in the public and private spheres of the individualized and sexualized cultures of modern societies in the 21st century. Our thesis is that erotic capital is rising in social and economic importance today, gives women an advantage, and is a key factor in women's changing status in society and the economy (p. 512).

Hakim argues that erotic capital can be more important than economic or social capital in certain occupations, such as the entertainment industry. The issue of possible "downsides" to being pretty has been in the popular and trade press for some time, but is not found as frequently in scholarly literature.

In one of the few scholarly studies, Braun, Peus and Frey (2012) found that leader attractiveness interacts with leader gender to predict followers' trust and loyalty toward their leader. In addition, high levels of attractiveness led to *unfavorable* follower evaluations of trust and loyalty only for female leaders, but not for males.

Two broad themes emerge in the review of the literature on this topic. The first is that a bias toward attractive women (but not men) is destructive in the workplace, as it favors some over others based on an attribute that is irrelevant to a person's value as a worker. The second and opposing theme is that attractiveness is a source of economic power and a useful commodity for both that person and for their organization. In addition, attractiveness can be useful in the workplace for two very different reasons:

- Attractiveness can be a driver of advantages that accrue across a person's development and influence personality and behavior positively, thus resulting in greater competence. From this perspective, there can be an ethical basis for supporting the hiring of attractive people, as they may be more competent because of these developmental advantages.
- Attractive people can be of greater value to an organization because of attributions assigned to them by the public.

From this perspective, the belief is that attractive people are economically more valuable to an organization in certain positions *even* if they are not as competent as a less attractive person who can do the same job. It would follow that the organization would affirmatively protect them from any vagaries caused by their advantage within the organization because of their unique value. Both perspectives on the utility of attractiveness in the workplace are discussed further below.

Discrimination in the workplace based on gender is well-documented in the literature. Women are assumed to be less competent than men, regardless of how they look (Heilman& Haynes, 2005). Heilman and Haynes' (2005) three-part study demonstrated that for women, working with men in traditionally male domains can be especially problematic; a woman may not get credit for her role in an accomplishment made by her work group even if the work is a success. This finding held *unless*:

- There was information about the female worker's individual contributions to the task group;
- The female team member's contribution to the overall outcome was clear because of aspects of the task; or
- There was a history of the female team member's past competence.

If these conditions were not present, the work of women became less visible and they were thought to have had less of a role in the success of the task group than their fellow male group members. Unless a contribution was clearly attributed to a woman, the overall achievement was not credited to her, and the idea that women are less competent and therefore could not be equal contributors was sustained. The work of Glink, Larson, Johnson and Branstiter (2005) lends support; they demonstrated that attractive women with high status face greater discrimination when compared to attractive women with low status jobs. Thus, on the surface, attractive women are perceived as competent if they are employed in menial positions, but are perceived as *incompetent* if they have a high status position.

Johnson and Gurung (2011) identify variables that mitigate employment discrimination based on gender and focus on the role of competence. For instance, when judgments were made concerning the capacity of women, the effects of objectification related to attractiveness were diminished when evidence that the attractive person was competent was presented. For attractive women, however, there is an assumption that their success has been related to their attractiveness rather than to their ability ("she climbed the ladder of success on her back"). Heilman and Stopeck (1985a, b) found that attractiveness had a differential impact on the attributions of individual success. For men, their attractiveness seemed to enhance the attributions of their capacity, but for women, attractiveness diminished attributions of their capacity. In other words, ability in the workplace is explained differentially, based on gender. Personal attractiveness was not a factor in garnering social support at work, an asset key to success in work groups. It was a person's collegial behaviors that were most related to the level of social support they would receive at work (Bowling, et al, 2004). Additionally, constraints on the association of competence with attractiveness were found in a study of voter preferences. Voters typically evaluate an attractive candidate more favorably than they typically evaluate an equivalent unattractive candidate.

However, some voters will resist the biasing influence of physical appearance under "high cognitive capacity" conditions, i.e., when they are not distracted and are informed (Hart, Ottati, &Krumdick, 2011). In these circumstances, they will typically not reject a candidate based on physical unattractiveness. High cognitive capacity conditions do not occur when voters possess low levels of expertise, or are distracted. It can be assumed that in many instances, attractive candidates are evaluated more favorably than unattractive candidates (Hart et al.).

Hamermesh and Biddle (1994) found that attractiveness in both men and women provides an advantage, and being less attractive exacts a cost. They "suggest a 7–9 percent penalty for being in the lowest 9 percent of looks among all workers, and a 5 percent premium for being in the top 33 percent" and estimate that the earnings advantage for attractive people is 12 percent higher than those who are less attractive (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994, p. 1186). They found similar results in a study involving attorneys (Biddle & Hamermesh, 1998). While these studies adjusted for other determinants, they were not able to determine if beauty led to actual differences in productivity, other studies did establish this connection. For example, characteristics of service providers such as gender and physical attractiveness can play a significant role in customer–server encounters. Luoh and Tsaur (2009) found that customer perception of service quality in the restaurant industry is influenced more positively with attractive servers under both favorable and unfavorable service quality conditions. This is an important issue, because privileging attractiveness in the workplace can only be justified economically if it is related to increased productivity or other kinds of positive outcomes for the business. There is still limited research evidence that attractiveness is associated with greater productivity. Regardless, some employers believe that attractiveness contributes to their bottom line and will risk charges of illegal discrimination to hire someone they think will provide this apparent benefit over someone who may not (Greenhouse, 2003).

Recruitment

The arena for this focus group was envisioned as extremely sensitive. Goffman's (1959) concept of team secrets provided an excellent backdrop for enlisting participants. In particular, Goffman's conceptualizations of entrusted secrets, and inside secrets, proved to be a critical help. Inside secrets are those that known by the team and are seen as something shared only with other teammates to increase team bonding. Entrusted secrets, however, are kept in order to maintain the role and team integrity and trustworthiness. Kim's conundrum became the catalyst for entrance into private world of the dark side of being pretty. The story of Kim allowed the researcher to establish a rapport and enter this very private world because it acknowledged that he had an empathic understanding of the secret.

On a face-to-face and individual basis, a researcher introduced the Kim story to three focus group candidates. Without exception, each woman's mouth dropped opened—the secret was out and known by an outsider. All three of these candidates were well known to the researcher and all had a high degree of comfort in speaking openly. The researcher explained how focus groups are employed to address themes. In this context, that would be behavioral patterns associated with the dark side of being pretty. He explained that focus group discussions can address the manner in which like-minded and like-experienced individuals discuss common interests. A transcription of the discussion becomes the data. Each conversation with a potential participant lasted from 45 minutes to an hour and a half. These three candidates who were (beauty) pageant participants agreed to become put of the focus group research.

 Inclusion criteria specified that participants must be (beauty) pageant participants; college educated, and has worked or about to work in a professional career. In order to operationalize attractiveness, (beauty) pageant participation was employed as an entrance criterion for the objective appraisal of beauty. Other objective standards for assessing beauty exist in the literature (Swami, Furnham, & Joshi, 2008; Swami, Einon & Furnham, 2007; Muñoz-Reyes, Iglesias-Julios, Pita & Turiegano, 2015; Fisher, Hahn, DeBruine, & Jones, 2015; Galantucci, Di Gioia, Lavecchia & Percoco, 2014). However, they are quite obtrusive and would NOT be approved by any IRB in the United States for our research.

The snowball sampling (Bryman, 2012) led to recruitment of 10 participants, but on the day of the group two (a mother and daughter) were unable to attend because of unexpected family events. These beauty pageant and contest/competition participants came from diverse backgrounds.

Two were non-Hispanic white, two African American, and four Native American (n = 8). They were aged 22 to 55 years old and signed informed consent to participate in the study identified as "the dark side of being pretty."

Concepts that Emerged from Recruitment

During the recruitment and screening process, observations regarding the unique characteristics of the subjects were made. Two concepts emerged from the recruitment process that proved helpful in framing the issues later described by the participants in the focus. These were cognitive dissonance and *Schadenfreude*; each is discussed.

Cognitive Dissonance

The fountainhead for understanding the concept of cognitive dissonance springs comes from the work of Festinger (1957) and Brehm and Cohen (1962). Initially, cognitive dissonance was employed to theoretically guide clinicians towards understanding stress and anxiety outside of a psychoanalytic framework. In those early days, scholars and clinicians were disparately attempting to find an explanation of internal conflict which *excluded* concepts such as Freud's penis envy. Since the theoretical evolution away from Freud's original psychoanalytic theory, the concept of cognitive dissonance has been fruitful in explaining and understanding internal conflict, without including a sexual dimension. Briefly, the theory of cognitive dissonance can remove deep-seated sexual tension from explanations of the emotional distress (anxiety and depression) found within attractive women. Cognitive dissonance emerges when an individual is faced with two social realities that are in direct conflict with each other. Both social realities are believed to be factual, but the one excludes the other – together they cannot exist. If one social reality is true, the other must be false. Cognitive dissonance occurs when a person must decide which social reality is true. Anxiety and/or depression emerge from the decision-making process. Both beliefs are inherently cherished, but one belief must be dropped, while the other must be accepted.

The literature is rich with research supporting the proposition that attractive women have opportunities afforded to them that are not available to less attractive women (as cited previously: Berscheid and Walster 1978; Gurung and Chrouser 2007; Luoh and Tsaur 2009; Rhode 2010). However, our research demonstrates that as quickly as these doors of opportunity are open; they can be slapped shut in a nanosecond.[4] These doors of opportunity are opened and slammed shut via meaningful, nonverbal, and symbolic social gestures. Most people understand these symbolic gestures – including the person transmitting the message, the person receiving the message and outside observers (who are not as physically attractive as the receiver of the message is). Such an outside observer is likely to respond in a nonverbal and contemptuous manner which has been referred to as *Schadenfreude*.

Schadenfreude

Schadenfreude is a German word that has no equivalent in English. It is commonly used to describe pleasure derived in witnessing the misfortunes of another person. In this study, it refers to the pleasure derived from witnessing the downfall of a woman who is particularly attractive and talented. *Schadenfreude* is a central concept that underlies the research within this project. It is a compound word in German, where *Schaden* refers to harm or damage, and *Freude* refers to happiness or joy. Cognitive dissonance emerges among attractive women when they derive advantages for being particularly attractive, while at the same time they are subjected to contempt and hostility as a consequence of being attractive. Being pretty is a double-edged sword, and cognitive dissonance emerges from the experience of this dual reality.

Method

The IRB-approved study was initially conceptualized using Goffman's dramaturgical framework for sample collection for an unstructured focus group. Analysis of the transcription thus had to take into account the possibility that participants may have limited the experiences they shared due to the presence of a white male authority figure. The authors independently reviewed the transcript to identify emergent themes.

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[4] The lightning speed shifts from open to shut doors of opportunity is incongruent and programmatic for employing Goffman's (1963) work on stigma as a conceptual framework.

All eight focus group participants were extremely aware of acting with an ever changing social script. As suggested earlier, the role shifts from actor who is privileged to the same actor who is subjected with contempt. Findings are presented and discussed below.

Findings

Patterns of perceived injustices were uncovered during analysis, and several themes emerged. These included: (a) achievement; (b) vulnerability; (c) support; (d) awareness of gendered experience; and (e) anxiety and/or depression. Table 1 identifies representative quotes that can be associated with each emergent theme. Themes are discussed further below, as are the perceptions of stigma that could be found across all themes.

Table 1: Emergent Themes

Emergent Theme	Representative Quote
Achievement	…it's not like the pageants that you see on TV now, by any stretch of the imagination, so I competed and I loved theater and I loved being on the stage. Pageants were something that came natural to me.
Vulnerability	I thought my peers loved me and after that [becoming homecoming queen] girls hated me and I lost so many friends. I didn't even wanna go to high school anymore.
	You almost have to overcompensate with kindness. If you're having an off day you don't want to socialize but I still have to have a smile on my face or people will think I'm stuck up.
Support	I have my friends and they understand but you don't want to always go to them with your problems and I'm sure my mom's tired of hearing it, but actually after I leave here I'm going home it will be the first time since the beginning of the school year and I'm pretty sure when I get there I'm just going to cry and she's going to be there for me.
Awareness of gendered experience	… with me for instance right now I'm job searching because my job ends December 31st and I feel like I have to dress myself down, I pull my hair back into a ponytail and especially if the interview is with a woman because I've seen in the past I get judged by looks alone.
	… you can talk to a male donator and you're not flirting with him but you're being really nice to him and you will get more versus a woman, who you go to have lunch with, a lady or someone that's older, you have to be very humble and make sure they are the center of attention. Even in sales when I was in Atlanta, and this was just a part time job I sold jewelry, if a guy came in by his self I could sell him anything but if he came in with his girl I paid attention to her, I hardly talked to him, because I knew she would think I was flirting with him…
Anxiety and/or depression	… I will get really depressed in that hole where I can't get out and I think to myself and get guilty because I'm like what do I have to be sad about and if people were to know that I was depressed and I've mentioned it to people I feel comfortable with but they are like what do you have to be depressed about.
	… I am at a point where I can't take it anymore and I have had to turn to medicine to be able to help me get through the process and I just never thought I would ever have to turn to something like that. When I did I felt horrible I was like why can't I just be strong enough to take it why did I have to turn to this.

Participants reported experiencing *achievement* in the areas of pageants, cheerleading, elections, and school. All were high-performing achievers, whose success was often attributed by others to contacts or family influence.

A participant recalled "I dated the quarterback and my senior year they elected me for homecoming queen and that was [an] exciting night and then I won." Yet a third participant stated "The first one I did I won and I also won cover girl and then a year later I did another one."

Participant successes included academic and professional achievements, as well as beauty-related accolades. In response to direct questions by the group leader, participants repeatedly rebutted suggestions that successes might have been seen by others as due to sexual relationships.

Vulnerability was a recurring theme. Participants discussed abusive relationships and domestic violence. Several recalled being threatened by peers in school, and in one instance having a physical response to a trigger because of pent-up frustration and anger. The dangers of media sites, including Facebook sites, were discussed in terms of potential for long-term negative consequences on careers. A participant reflected:

It's almost like they think you are pretty already, why do you need anything else. Why can't you just be pretty and happy? Why does she get to have everything? Why does she get to be successful? Why does she have to have a good job? Then she has a beautiful house, then she has these gorgeous children, and then she has a good looking husband, why does she have all that?

Going above and beyond to compensate with kindness/niceness and smiling regardless of actual feelings were identified repeatedly. One participant shared: You go above and beyond to be nice. I have a smile and a hello for everyone. However, people they turn their head when they see you coming so they don't have to speak to you; just foolish things like that. Participants' looks led to socially isolating "us" versus "them" experiences that could be unpleasantly discriminatory.

Participants agreed about the importance of *support* and particularly noted the supportive others in their lives, that included friends and parents. A participant stated "I've been blessed. I have some great friends I really do but it took me a long time to find who was good and who wasn't good." Greek life sororities were also identified as a source of support, which may relate to the importance of Native American sororities at the historically Native American university many of the participants had attended.

Nonetheless, participants expressed feeling left out of normal social support networks, because of their looks. One mother observed "I had my daughter young; I had my first one at 18 so I don't know if it's an age thing, but I do find with older woman I feel unwelcome." Another participant responded, that in "my age group it happens also; my friends won't invite me to their homes, because they don't want me around their husband and that hurts." This resonated with other participants as well: "My ex he was like so-and-so wants to go on a double date, but she said no because she's scared her boyfriend's going to be looking at you." These were experiences participants had in common.

The shared experiences of rejection/exclusion due to looks occurred among women, which leads to the recurring theme *awareness of gendered experience*. Participants discussed choosing to dress down, and trying to hide prettiness due to being judged on looks alone – as one participant said "no one ever takes you seriously." Participants also expressed sensitivity to the differing impact of looks (dress/hair/make-up) on others, as well as to social class. The "Indian crickets" and "crab bucket" metaphors were identified and discussed by Native American and African American participants, respectively. Both metaphors refer to trying to leave "the bucket" (*Schadenfreude*), that is, trying to succeed within a dominant cultural milieu and being pulled back down by those who might otherwise feel unsuccessful, or be left behind.

Awareness of gendered experience was also emphasized in the work environment. One participant identified the difficulties encountered with holding multiple roles:

… for my clients I have to look one way but to go to a court room to get a judge to take me seriously or even pay me attention I have to be all dolled up like if I'm my normal self he is going to act like he doesn't see me but if I'm fixed up he is going to pay attention and listen to what I have to say about the case.

From a professional standpoint, participants agreed about the necessity of approaching men and women differently; all had experienced jealousy and judging from other women, as well as other negative reactions.

The role of "friends" in backstabbing and gossip was discussed and participants agreed that women feel insecure and/or intimidated by an attractive woman. Stigma seemed overwhelmingly present in these contexts, one participant noting that with "men you have to be very careful about how you speak and they judge me right off the bat as a dumb blonde." Another participant demonstrated both awareness of gendered experience, and its potential for stigmatization, when she stated "I have a guard up with male professors, males in any sort of supervisor position."

The final emergent theme is that of *anxiety and/or depression* -- a classical consequence of cognitive dissonance. A participant observed that "With depression and anxiety, people don't understand how you look the way you do and still be so self-conscious about yourself and everyone expects you to be like I'm pretty and I know it." All participants reported having broken down and cried occasionally. Heads nodded around the table, for example, when a participant remarked: "You always feel better with a good cry."

Participants reported concerns about being seen as stuck-up, and used neutralization strategies such as those mentioned previously (e.g., dressing down, going out of their way to be nice). One participant remarked "you have to be on your game all the time." All participants were very aware of the impact their looks had on their experience of stigma. One participant summed this up by stating: "Maybe an unattractive person can get all dressed up and no one thinks twice about it, but if we dress up and look nice we're trying to show off."

Implications and Recommendations

There exists a vast warehouse of well-documented evidence demonstrating that attractive women have distinct social advantages. This is common knowledge. In addition, it would be naive to assume that attractive women fail to recognize their unique social advantage, or that they fail to exploit it. Nonetheless, the "dark side" of being pretty is not well documented. In fact, this focus group discussion clearly demonstrates the existence of sex discrimination on the basis of being pretty. More dramatically, this type of discrimination can be hidden (or as Goffman would say, "back stage" and "secret"). Victims of this type of discrimination rarely discuss it, and the authors of this study asked: Why? The answer lies in the generally commonly acknowledged advantages of being socially attractive. Attractive women are not going to complain or discuss the disadvantages of being attractive, because at best such voiced distress is met with contempt and animosity. Thus, the disadvantages or "dark side" of being pretty rarely get articulated, much less discussed. Unlike other types of discrimination, in this case no one makes public complaints or files law suits. It is important to note that this means any symptoms of depression and anxiety which appear among these women, do so without any corresponding ability to address a potential root cause.

In concert with this observation, the literature and research on cognitive dissonance offer profound insight in understanding the distress faced by these women. Simply stated, for many women physical attractiveness can be both a blessing and a curse. These women are pulled in two disparate directions simultaneously. Essentially, their lives are embedded in a permanent paradox. Therapeutically, it is clear that in order to effectively address the paradox, individuals must first acknowledge that such a paradox exists. How does one acknowledge such a paradox, when there is no avenue to safely discuss it with others? Here lies the problem in the "dark side" of being pretty for women. Interestingly, there is no evidence to suggest that handsome men face any corresponding "dark side" of being handsome.

With the accumulating internalization of distress, comes the addition of audience *Schadenfreude* (defined previously). Besides observing the ongoing movement between advantage and distress, Goffman's audience (outside observers) experience joy when observing the failure of attractive women. Such joy can compound attractive women's sense of failure with rejection and ridicule. With public figures, for example, there is almost a carnival-like atmosphere when media report on the downfall of attractive female celebrities. Events experienced by Amanda Bynes, Lindsay Lohan, and Britney Spears are classic examples of *Schadenfreude*. Although not as public as these celebrities, the members of this focus group have felt the *Schadenfreude* sting. They witnessed joy in their "friends" and acquaintances when they faced failure. The "dark side of being pretty" is an appropriate phrase to describe their dilemma.

Focus group research provides a platform for extracting new theoretical concepts and operationalizing them for continued research using larger samples. Within this focus group study, one particular recommendation for further research can be made.

Focus group findings suggest that college educated women with above average physical appearance may be more likely to experience cognitive dissonance than college educated women who have average or below average physical appearance. This proposition could be operationalized through the use of a two-group comparison study. By employing one of the measurement tools for cognitive dissonance, and identifying above average attractive women and less attractive women, the scores of physically attractive and less physically attractive college educated females could be analyzed to determine whether statistically significant differences were present.

A significant difference between the two groups in the appropriate direction could support findings from the focus group and have important applied implications for therapeutic intervention. The ethical ramifications of labeling women as more or less attractive would, however, need to be adequately addressed for IRB purposes. Such ethical considerations (e.g., the potentially negative impact of self-labeling), as well as recognized cultural differences in what is considered attractive in women, highlight some of the difficulties inherent in researching the "dark side" of being pretty.

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