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Beauty: The Unfair Advantage

Do me a favor: pick up the closest magazine and take a quick gander at the people inside. What do you see? I see airbrushed models and an unrealistic portrayal of what someone should look like. I see beautiful people. These beautiful people are all around us in everyday life. In today’s society, beautiful people are gobbling up the good careers and high paying salaries with ease. Within the past twenty years, beauty has gone from a natural perk to something that is very ugly. Now-a-days, beauty is an advantage, and even sometimes a burden, to those who do possess this trait, as well as an extremely superficial burden to those who are not naturally beautiful due to societal standards and pressures.

Let me give you a little background information. Growing up, my grandfather periodically told me that my beauty alone would get me far in life. He even told me once that I could be beautiful for a living and live an easy, happy life. I believed him. As a young girl, if I was asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, my immediate response was, “I want to be beautiful.” Thanks Grandpa. After years of school, which included years of caddy girls, unfair teachers, and rude peers, I no longer believe that one could live off of their looks and be happy. In high school, I enjoyed getting ready for school. I did my hair and makeup perfectly every morning, checked my appearance between classes, and always made sure to wear a cute outfit. This was an utter waste of time and effort. I always presented myself as a very put together young lady. I appeared to be on top of my school work, that nothing could bother me. Because I was one of the ‘beautiful people’ (gag), my peers always assumed my life was just peachy. This consequently made my beauty a burden and I resented it. I thought ‘just because I looked put together did not mean I did my homework or that I was good at math.’ I felt that teachers, as well as my peers, had higher expectations of me strictly because of my put-together appearance. Well, higher expectations equaled a longer, harder fall when I was unsuccessful or when I made mistakes. Studies show that “those high in [physical attractiveness] must also shoulder the burden of their bosses’ higher expectations or jealousy—and when the boss is frustrated or disappointed, they pay a higher penalty for personal indiscretions than their more ordinary-looking colleagues” (Patzer). This shows that a person with good looks might get a heavier punishment than those who might be average looking. Fair? I think not. While my life could have been a complete struggle, more was expected of me due to my appearance. This became a burden in school. This burden made me stop caring about school completely. Research shows that “very attractive kids may grow up to be insecure adults, especially if they were praised solely for their appearance” (Flora). With all these negative results in being beautiful, why do so many individuals strive to be beautiful? This is because although beauty has its disadvantages, it also has many very obvious advantages in life.

This leads me to the loaded question: are beautiful people more successful? Research and studies say yes, beautiful people are more successful. “Studies show attractive students get more attention and higher evaluations from their teachers; good-looking patients get more personalized care from their doctors” (Lorenz). This is a horrific truth. This study shows that if two men, one man more attractive than the other, were to walk into a hospital with the same illness, the more attractive male would receive better treatment. This is extremely unsettling. If my father, or any loved one, becomes ill, I do not want his or her care to be altered because of another patient’s beauty. Aside from patient care, it is also said that attractive people are better off in the business world and workplace. This begins even before you are hired. “If you are competing for a position against candidates who seem to possess exactly the same qualifications, but you are very attractive while the others are average…scientific studies say that you will get the job and they will not” (Patzer). Does it make sense that two equal candidates on paper are unequal because one is more attractive than the other? Even though it may be wrong beauty is the tie breaker. After speaking to someone who deals with hiring new staff, my uncle, Greg Constant, admits to subconsciously hiring the more attractive applicant. This is because those in charge of hiring “think the person with high personal attractiveness is actually better qualified or, if not, will nevertheless turn into a better employee” (Patzer). Our brains are programmed to respond to physical appearance – to respond positively to attractive physical appearance. Unfortunately, we cannot blame those who hire the prettier candidate. We must blame biology.

So, after being hired because you are more beautiful, the perks keep coming. “Evidence from studies conducted in the United States, Canada, and China in 1994 and 1999 suggests that highly attractive employees enjoy increased earnings of between 7.5 % and 15% over their average looking peers” (Patzer). If you are beautiful, you will not only get the job over others, but you will also be paid more. Just because you’re beautiful. This might help to explain why “Americans spent $10.3 billion on cosmetic surgery in 2008, a 338% increase since 1997” (Gettelman). Americans are literally trying to improve their appearance to get ahead in life.

As you can see, beautiful people are, in fact, more successful than their average-looking counterparts. It is said that “the penalty for being homely exceeds the premium for beauty and that across all occupations, the effects are greater for men than women” (Lorenz). On a side note, it has also been proven that those who are taller earn more money and those who are overweight are more likely to be unemployed. To be the perfect job applicant, you have to be tall, thin, beautiful, and have the resume to back it up. That’s a lot of pressure. This pressure is affecting teenagers, young adults, as well as older adults. But how does beauty affect those who are not in the knock-out club? Facts show that “plain people earn 5 percent to 10 percent less than people of average looks, who in turn earn 3 percent to 8 percent less than those deemed good-looking” (Lorenz). This means that just because someone has a big nose or eyes that are too far apart, they will more than likely earn less money than their better looking counter parts.

Beauty affects everyone. Your brain is naturally programmed to respond to beautiful people and beautiful things. Most people are self-conscious when they are around others who appear to be more beautiful than them. “We can feel like the belle of the ball at one party, but downright shabby at the next, all on the same night” (Flora). I agree completely to this statement. At one party, you could be surrounded by people that you feel prettier than or that you are familiar with. At the next party, you might feel awkward and plain because you’re surrounded by those who are the elite ‘beautiful people’ or people who you simply do not know. In my opinion, someone should not be rewarded because they look good. In a fair, perfect world, people should be judged simply on character and experience, rather than their looks. My definition of beauty exposes a sad truth: looks do matter. To those who disagree, you are probably one of the ‘beautiful people’ or you are too enthralled in your own appearance to notice the ugly truth that is taking place all around you. My advice is this: in the future, when you’re a big time executive in your fancy schmancy business, break this unspoken rule. Change this trend that is destroying the confidence of the plain looking people; fight biology and pay attention to qualifications, not the looks. The definition of beauty should not be a burden or something superficial. In the future, I hope to be proven wrong and shown that beauty is a natural perk, not a natural advantage.

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