

Why Does Appearance Impact Women's Wages? A Systematic Review of Factors Contributing to Appearance-Based Disparate Compensation Practices

Abstract

Appearance-based discrimination has the potential to influence organizations, managers, and employees; appearance discrimination is referred to as lookism and is highly intertwined with sexism and ageism, but it is a unique and isolable form of discrimination. Currently, there is evidence indicating the presence of disparate compensation practices associated with appearance-based discrimination; however, there is a lack of evidence proposing an explanation for the practices or perceptions that contribute to disparate compensation practices relating to appearance. The specific problem is that industry and academic evidence indicates organizations are permitting appearance-based assumptions or attitudes to influence compensation decisions; accordingly, this systematic review analyzes current literature to develop findings related to factors contributing to appearance-based compensation disparity for female employees.

Based on the systematic review results, four themes of either practices or perceptions contribute to appearance-based disparate compensation. The first theme is that appearance-based disparate compensation is role dependent and that women self-select into specific roles if they believe their appearance will benefit them in that role. This theme is followed by adhering to social norms or expectations that contribute to disparate compensation. The last two highly intertwined themes are biased beliefs such as appearance positively corresponds with productivity and that attractive women have more desirable personalities. Finally, this systematic review offers managers recommendations to mitigate appearance-based disparate compensation practices informed by the analyzed literature.

Keywords: pay or compensation disparity, lookism, appearance discrimination, women

Introduction

While there is empirical research on appearance-based discrimination against women dating back to at least the 1960s when women started joining the workplace at a more regular frequency, the question "Does it pay to be beautiful?" was not deeply analyzed until Hamermesh and Biddle's seminal work on employee attractiveness and subsequent impacts to the labor market in 1994 (Allison, 1976; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994). Hamermesh and Biddle's work identified lookism, a form of discrimination using a standard of appearance as justification for the mistreatment of persons not meeting the standard, as a basis for employee compensation decisions (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994). They found that attractive people are paid 5-10% more than their "plain" or average-appearance peers, while people who are below appearance standards are paid approximately 5% less than their average-appearing peers; the researchers coined this phenomenon the "beauty premium" and the "ugly penalty" (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994). For ease of definition, throughout this analysis, both terms "beauty premium" and "ugly penalty" are collapsed into the term "beauty premium," indicating disparate compensation relating to a standard of appearance. In order to assess and develop alternative management practices related to appearance discrimination or lookism, the underlying perceptions and practices for lookism need to be understood to create awareness for organizational leaders.

While it is broadly accepted that beauty premium exists, there is no consolidated view of why it exists. Is it as easy as initially theorized: simply that attractive people have an inherent benefit or are underlying factors driving the beauty premium? Many researchers have approached this question using various research methods ranging from interviews to quantifying complex experiments with varying results; however, given the variety of methodological approaches and inconsistent use of a standardized tool, previous findings have

not had a considerable impact on answering this question. This analysis contributes to the literature gap by performing a systematic review to aggregate the evidence and develop themes of underlying factors contributing to disparate compensation for female employees based on appearance.

Research Question

The research question for this systematic review is: What appearance perceptions or practices are attributed to disparate compensation practices for women in organizations?

Theoretical Frame

The theoretical framework used to analyze the research findings is the prototype model of perceived discrimination (the term "prototype" is used synonymously with "expectations" in this model) (Harris et al., 2004; Inman, 2001; Inman & Baron, 1996). Because the research question relates to perceptions and practices that result in discriminatory behavior, this model was selected because it emphasizes the relationships between the influence of the perception of discrimination and the consequences of these perceptions. According to this model, the factors that influence the perception of discrimination are differences between perpetrator and victim, intention, harm caused, and an allowance for random variables such as personal identity or emotional state at the time of the action (see figure 1).

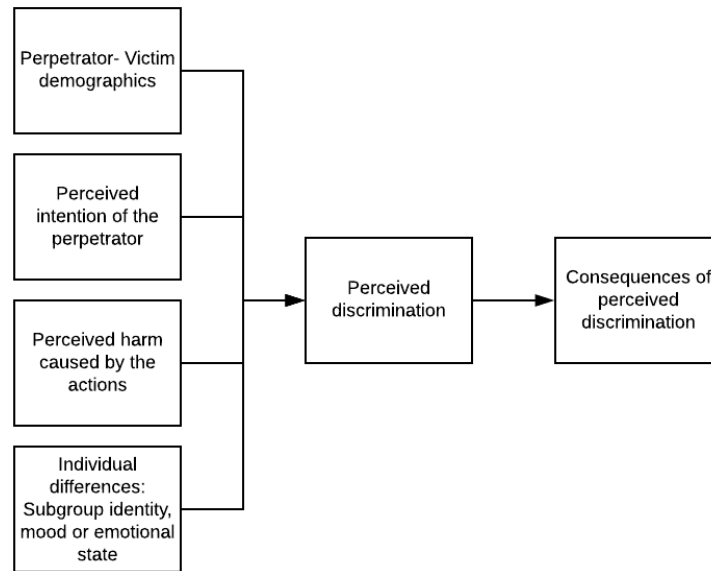


Figure 1. Prototype model of perceived discrimination from "Influence of prototypes on perceptions of prejudice" by Inman, M. L., & Baron, R. S., 1996, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70(4), 727–739.

The prototype model allows for ambiguity within the perpetrator's motives and recognizes the role of the victim in discriminatory acts; specifically, the prototype model of perceived discrimination recognizes that the victim must perceive discrimination, and one of the assumptions of this systematic review is the beneficiaries of the disparate wages (increased wages as a result of the beauty premium) are not suffering from the adverse effects of lookism, rather the women who are not receiving increased compensation are the victims of the discrimination (Inman, 2001; Inman & Baron, 1996). Updating this model to reflect lookism clearly indicates the relationship between the practices and perceptions of appearance and disparate compensation (see Figure 2).

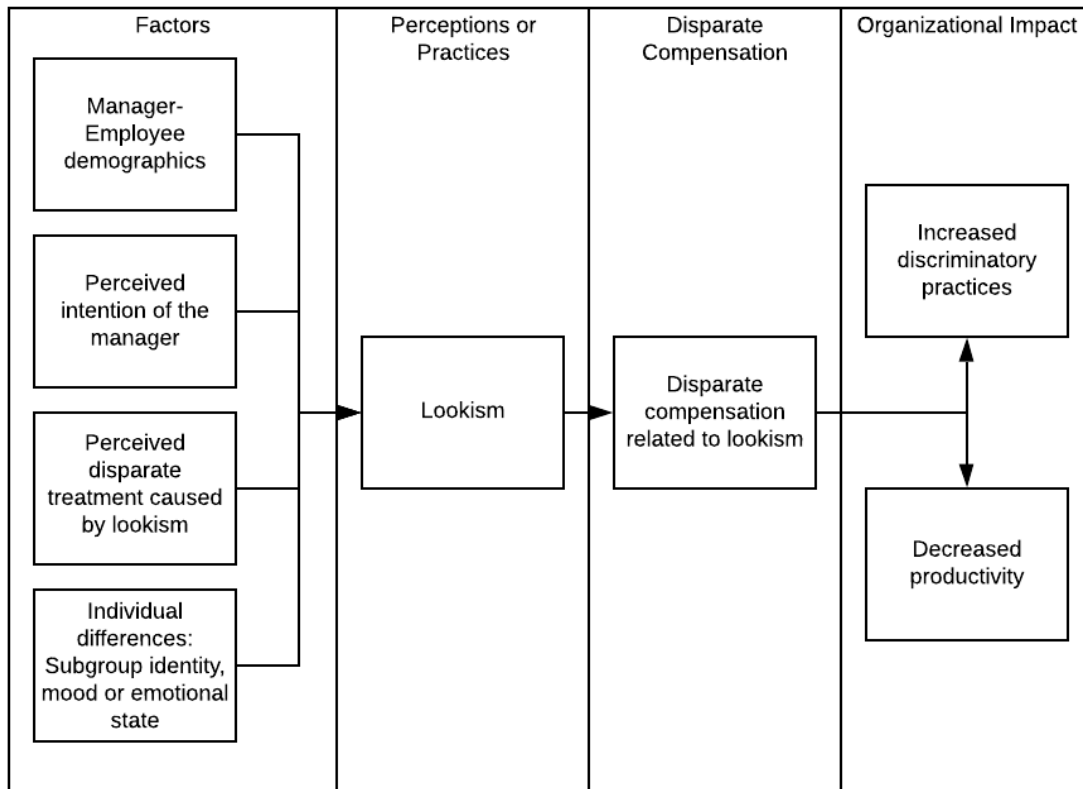


Figure 2. Prototype model of perceived discrimination reflecting the relationship between practices and perceptions resulting in disparate compensation. Adapted from "Influence of prototypes on perceptions of prejudice" by Inman, M. L., & Baron, R. S., 1996, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70(4), 727–739

These perceptions and practices and the following disparate compensation activity may impact organizations with productivity and results of discriminatory practices (e.g., employee well-being or risk of liability) (Calvasina & Calvasina, 2017; Ramati-Ziber et al., 2019).

Explanation of the Organizational Problem

In a 2017 Pew research study, 35% of Americans listed physical attractiveness as one of the most valued characteristics in women; it is unlikely that the respondents forget these values when they shift into the workplace mindset (Ramati-Ziber et al., 2019). While the subject of most studies, the average or estimated percentage of the income differential is less

relevant than the evidence that organizations permit appearance-based assumptions or attitudes to influence compensation decisions (Cavico et al., 2016). The compensation differential is a tangible symptom of lookism in the organization, indicating a need for awareness and solutions to prevent the detrimental effects of lookism. Lookism is highly intertwined with sexism and ageism as reasons for not offering employees equal compensation for equal work or compensation based on qualifications (Cavico et al., 2016; Friedrichs, 2015). Because of the similarities and interdependencies between these three forms of discrimination, it is argued that the same negative impacts on productivity caused by ageism and sexism can be attributed to lookism as well (Anýžová & Matějů, 2018; Cavico et al., 2016; Dossinger et al., 2019; Friedrichs, 2015; Kanazawa & Still, 2018; Ramati-Ziber et al., 2019). Discrimination and social hierarchical beliefs correlate with unequal social arrangements that implicitly "keep people in their place" and thus limit access to opportunities and diversity within the workplace, limiting the organization's human capital and productivity (Friedrichs, 2015; Ramati-Ziber et al., 2019).

Methodology

The primary objective of this systematic review is to aggregate and assess current literature to identify underlying catalysts for appearance-driven disparate compensation practices. To meet this objective, ultimately, 21 research studies and the seminal 1994 publication were analyzed and assessed using thematic synthesis to identify themes and develop findings (Barnett-Page et al., 2008).

The initial search strategy to find the research studies was performed using online academic publication databases with the following search string to identify appropriate literature for systematic review: (beauty premium OR lookism) AND (wages OR salary OR

income OR pay) and published after 2014. However, as the research evolved using cited bibliographies, the search string expanded to include keywords: appearance discrimination or human resources—additional literature inclusion criteria: academic or peer-reviewed, full text available online, and published in English. To ensure a diverse perspective of the problem, literature was reviewed from the fields of economics, management science, sociology, psychology, and legal or case law analysis. Data was collected using the University of Maryland Global Campus OneSearch (aggregating database), Business Source Complete, and Emerald Insight databases (see Figure 3 Prisma chart for additional details). Once the database searches were completed, the identified literature was screened for appropriateness in this systematic review.

Initial study selection was based on screening the title and abstract for mention of appearance and workplace; during the subsequent full-text assessment, the article exclusion criteria was applied to determine appropriateness for inclusion in this systematic review. The articles selected for full-text assessment were critically appraised using the TAPUPAS critical appraisal tool to quantify the quality of evidence being assessed and ensure the findings reported are derived from credible evidence (see Appendix B for full critical appraisal details) (Long et al., 2006). The TAPUPAS acronym stands for Transparency, Accuracy, Purposivity, Utility, Propriety, Accessibility, and Specificity, and each category is assessed individually to develop an aggregate score (max 21 points) of research quality or credibility (Long et al., 2006). The article exclusion criteria was: not explicitly referencing salary (or a synonym for salary), not reporting results by gender (as this analysis is limited to women), scoring less than 15 (70% of the maximum score of 21; numerical values assigned by category based on the quality of evidence) on the TAPUPAS critical appraisal tool (Long et al., 2006). Once the

articles were fully appraised and selected for inclusion, first, and second-cycle coding was performed using Atlas.ti to identify themes (see Appendix C for full coding details). The coding and thematic synthesis results identified four key themes: beauty premium is context or role-dependent, underlying biased beliefs justify the practices, maximizing the premium requires complying with social rules, and appearance is repeatedly linked with personality traits.

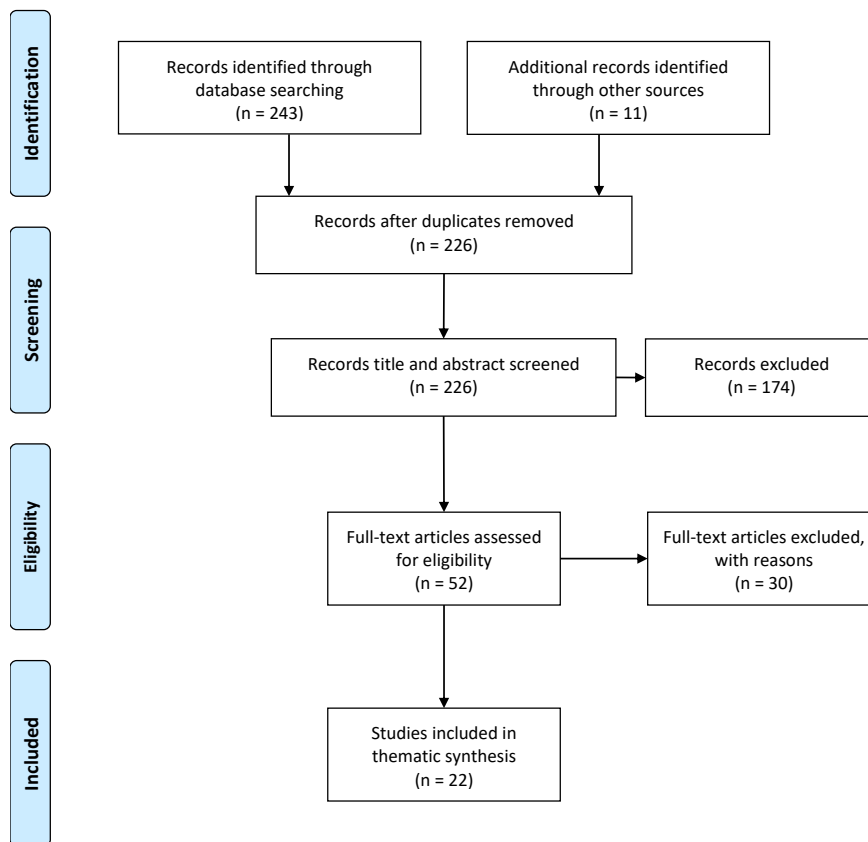


Figure 3. PRISMA flow diagram detailing the systematic review methodology for this study.

Findings

Upon review of the relevant literature, four recurring themes emerged; however, the findings are highly interrelated, and there is overlap within the reporting of the themes. The evidence substantiates each of the themes and warrants discussion as a unique theme,

understanding there are similarities and nuances within the themes. In addition to the four themes identified in the literature, there are two unexpected findings regarding the nature of lookism in the workplace.

Table 1.

Coding and Thematic Synthesis Results

Code #	First Cycle Coding	Second Cycle Coding
1	Beauty Premium	Beauty Premium
2	Compensation	
3	Income	
4	Remuneration	
5	Salary	
6	Wages	
7	Beauty is Good	Biased Beliefs
8	Capable	
9	Competence	
10	Customer Discrimination	
11	Halo Effect	
12	Performance	
13	Productivity	Lookism
14	Appearance	
15	Attractiveness	
16	Becker	
17	Differential	
18	Discrimination	
19	Disparate	
20	Employer Discrimination	
21	Favoritism	
22	Lookism	
23	Preferential	
24	Stereotypes	
25	Ugly	
26	Unattractive	
27	Choice	Occupational Selection
28	Crowding	
29	Occupation	
30	Prestige	
31	Selection	
32	Sorting	
33	Bargaining	Personality
34	Communication	
35	Confidence	
36	Cooperative	
37	Core-self	
38	Demeanor	
39	Humor	
40	Interpersonal	
41	Likability	

Code #	First Cycle Coding	Second Cycle Coding
42	Narcissism	
43	Negotiation	
44	Personality	
45	Pride	
46	Self-esteem	
47	Sociability	
48	Trustworthiness	
49	Well-adjusted	
50	Clothing	
51	Femininity	
52	Grooming	
53	Hair	
54	Hygiene	
55	Make-Up	Social Norms
56	Plain	
57	Social Norms	
58	Social Rules	
59	Styling	
60	Wardrobe	

The first unexpected finding is that both the manager and women they employ participate in the practices or perceptions that contribute to the beauty premium; the literature was approximately evenly balanced between managers' perceptions and employees' practices or perceptions. The balance of participation demonstrates the need for awareness and intervention for managers and employees. Furthermore, it illuminates the first theme that women potentially select their occupation based on the presumption of a beauty premium.

Beauty Premium Varies by Role or Tasks

Some occupations arguably benefit from attractiveness (fashion models, entertainers, potentially newscasters) and, as such, incentivize women to self-select or opt to pursue these occupations (Hooley & Yates, 2015; Robins et al., 2011). Furthermore, some occupations reportedly benefit from attractiveness (sales, marketing, public relations, client-facing roles), where women also self-select to successfully pursue these occupations (Chiang & Saw, 2018; Hooley & Yates, 2015; Kanazawa & Still, 2018). Successful, productive, and attractive women in these highly visible occupations contribute to a perception of a beauty premium

regardless of the actual compensation inequity (Chiang & Saw, 2018; Hooley & Yates, 2015; Kanazawa & Still, 2018). More simply, attractive women who earn premium wages motivate other attractive women to attempt to follow those career paths and capitalize on their appearance; this self-selection is more pronounced in highly visible fields or roles.

Compounding with individual self-selection, organizations signal a desire for occupational sorting with the inclusion of phrases such as "well put-together" or "well turned-out" or requesting a photo of the candidates in job advertisements (Chiang & Saw, 2018; Galarza & Yamada, 2017; Yates et al., 2017). These phrases in job postings indicate the manager's unspoken preference for employees who conform to a social standard or expectations relating to their appearance, thus signaling a preference that may be compensated accordingly. While the practice of explicit phrases in job postings is not as common in the United States, there is a trend among career advisors to advise modernizing resumes and including a headshot with the application materials (either via social media or resume templates). To further illustrate the self-sorting of attractiveness into roles, 75% of career advisors report wanting to understand more of employers' expectations regarding appearance and grooming to advise their clients; this request for information indicates an intention to inform their clients of appearance expectations for the role and the benefits of complying with social norms regarding appearance (Yates et al., 2017).

Conforming with Norms

One study argues that beauty is not actual appearance or set of features but rather the pursuit of standards relating to a specific social echelon (Ramati-Ziber et al., 2019). The literature consistently indicates that women who comply with social norms or expectations regarding appearance, as one study aptly put, ". . . reap rewards. . .", thus incentivizing women

to strive to meet the social guidelines of appearance (Ramati-Ziber et al., 2019; Wong & Penner, 2016). These rewards (beauty premiums) or punishments (ugly penalty) keep women invested in pursuing the current standards of beauty regardless of the ongoing gender or appearance discrimination their participation may induce (Hooley & Yates, 2015; Ramati-Ziber et al., 2019).

Additionally, if women are in high-power positions that are traditionally seen as male roles (such as finance or politics), the woman is under increased pressure to participate in grooming standards as a counter-balance to her presence in male-dominated roles (Friedricks, 2015; Mileva et al., 2016; Ramati-Ziber et al., 2019). An example of this pressure is that female politicians and lawmakers report media outlets interested in their appearance rather than their political views (Graham et al., 2017; Ramati-Ziber et al., 2019). Pressuring women to over-conform to offset their gender in a male role is one example of where lookism overlaps with sexism; however, choosing not to conform with social norms also potentially has ramifications for compensation.

It is important to note that the converse effect of not conforming with norms demonstrates the opposite effect where a woman may be subject to the "ugly penalty"; this effect was described in detail by researchers relating to female job candidates who are considered poorly groomed during the hiring process (Galarza & Yamada, 2017; Oreffice & Quintana-Domeque, 2016; Ramati-Ziber et al., 2019; Wong & Penner, 2016). Women who do not understand or choose not to navigate the social rules governing appearance in their workplaces may struggle to compete against their "well-groomed" peers for equal wages (Hooley & Yates, 2015; Yates et al., 2017). Not conforming with the social norms may result

in overcoming the manager's biased beliefs about the relationship between attractiveness and productivity or workplace contributions.

Biased Beliefs

One recurrent example of biased beliefs is that managers report potential productivity as the reason to prefer attractive women working for them. Several studies noted that their managerial participants believed there was a positive relationship between attractiveness and productivity (Chiang & Saw, 2018; Dossinger et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2017; Kanazawa & Still, 2018). Beauty or attractiveness was also frequently associated with competency and job-related characteristics such as intelligence without consistent evidence of a basis for these beliefs (Anýžová & Matějů, 2018; Borland & Leigh, 2014; Deryugina & Shurchkov, 2015; Dossinger et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2017; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Hooley & Yates, 2015; Kanazawa & Still, 2018; Robins et al., 2011; Wong & Penner, 2016). In their study evaluating the appearance and compensation of CEOs, researchers found a relationship between appearance and compensation but no relationship between appearance and performance (Graham et al., 2017). Instead, the higher compensation was associated with the "look of competence" (Graham et al., 2017). Beliefs related to the "look of competence" were often used to justify the disparate treatment because these employees are believed to be more productive, thus warrant higher salaries due to their contributions increasing the organization's profit or growth (Chiang & Saw, 2018; Graham et al., 2017). There is no conclusive evidence that above-average attractiveness correlates to increased productivity; however, this prevailing perception results in appearance-based discrimination (Robins et al., 2011).

These findings are not to argue that attractive people are less capable, rather the attractive employees may be subject to the "halo" effect, where the "beauty is good" heuristic extends the belief of a woman's "good" attributes to characteristics beyond appearance

(Borland & Leigh, 2014; Chiang & Saw, 2018; Dossinger et al., 2019; Friedrichs, 2015; Graham et al., 2017; Hooley & Yates, 2015). The most pervasive biased belief that extends the "beauty is good" heuristic is that attractive women have more pleasant personalities (Deryugina & Shurchkov, 2015; Dossinger et al., 2019; Kanazawa & Still, 2018; Robins et al., 2011). The belief that attractive women have more pleasant personalities was frequently found in the evidence and warrants reporting as a unique theme.

Personality Traits

Highly interrelated with biased beliefs is the perception that attractive people have inherent personality traits that benefit organizations, such as confidence and self-assuredness (Borland & Leigh, 2014; Kanazawa & Still, 2018; Robins et al., 2011). Examples of this pleasant personality belief are that attractive people tend to be happier and are less likely to deviate from expected behaviors (Borland & Leigh, 2014). A workplace-specific example is that attractive people have an increased work ethic, therefore meriting increased compensation (Borland & Leigh, 2014; Chiang & Saw, 2018). Multiple studies have assessed a relationship between confidence and beauty to find minimal empirical evidence indicating that more attractive people are universally more confident or self-assured (Borland & Leigh, 2014; Mobius & Rosenblat, 2006). Indicating the inverse effect, researchers have found a relationship between poor grooming habits (non-adherence with social norms) could be associated with lower earnings by contributing to workplace conflict or poor relationships (Robins et al., 2011). There is evidence that for occupations where personality is a determinant of productivity, such as sales or a role with a negotiation aspect, the beauty premium exists as attractiveness is linked with a desirable personality (Kanazawa & Still, 2018; Robins et al., 2011).

According to the "kernel of truth" hypothesis, proposed by Hatfield and Sprecher in 1986 as a means to explain the propagation of physical attractiveness stereotypes, the relationship between personality traits and attractiveness is symbiotic and starts in childhood (Deryugina & Shurchkov, 2015; Ford et al., 2018; Mobius & Rosenblat, 2006). The researchers suggest the "kernel of truth" begins in elementary school and is coupled with the stereotype that attractive people are not as competent at math or science (Deryugina & Shurchkov, 2015; Ford et al., 2018). This symbiotic relationship results in a self-fulfilling prophecy where society has higher expectations of attractive children's extroversion or communication skills, and attractive children receive preferential treatment based on these expectations, which results in traits such as extroversion or communication skills (Graham et al., 2017; Mobius & Rosenblat, 2006). The cyclical nature of personality development associated with childhood attractiveness mirrors the cyclical nature of lookism in organizations.

The second notable finding is the cyclical nature of the perceptions and practices; the incentives created by the perceptions lead to practice, which confirms the perceptions (see figure 3). This cyclical nature demonstrates Edward Schein's work on developing an organizational culture where the individual's beliefs and assumptions result in artifacts or manifestations of these assumptions creating a culture based on these assumptions (Schein, 1990).

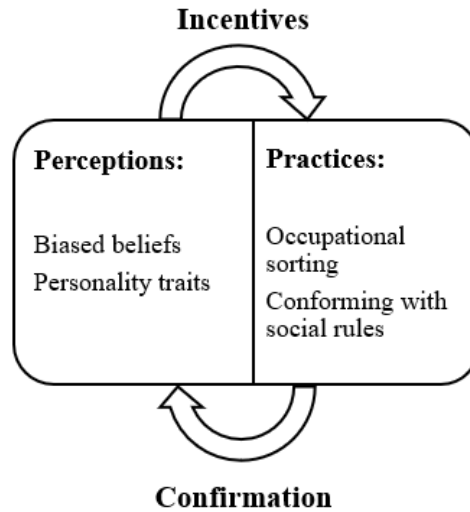


Figure 4. Example of the perception and practice cycle

While these perceptions and practices were decompressed as part of this analysis, the overarching theme regarding women's appearance in the workplace is that woman who is the "whole beautiful package," or a woman who chooses to dress and act attractively is believed to deserve higher wages, rather than assessing her qualifications or competence in the role (Chiang & Saw, 2018). Whether lookism starts as a perception or a practice, the themes merge and integrate into each other, resulting in the organizational problem of lookism impacting compensation decisions.

Discussion

An example of the pervasiveness of lookism in the workplace is 68% of career advisors report telling their clients (note this statistic was not segmented by client gender) that appearance, including the use of make-up and wardrobe, is vital for their interviewing and negotiation success (Yates et al., 2017). The high percentage of career advisors counseling their clients on workplace appearance demonstrates the pervasiveness of lookism in organizations and the pervasiveness of the perception of lookism with individual women.

While the impact of appearance is not as significant as gender, ethnicity, or apparent religious practices, there is evidence of an impact; in fact, the subtlety that lookism pervades and the disparate treatment may be the mechanism that allows these practices and perceptions to continue largely unnoticed by the management population. Multiple authors argue that while the beauty premium exists, the mechanism resulting in the subsequent disparate treatment is unclear, which limits the manager's ability to mitigate the effects of lookism in compensation decisions (Dossinger et al., 2019; Wong & Penner, 2016). Furthermore, discrimination research indicates that members of the disadvantaged group may participate or agree with justifications for disparate treatment, and women as recipients of lookism are no different in this regard (Ramati-Ziber et al., 2019). The unclear mechanisms, managers' inability to manage based on performance, and women's lack of systemic opposition results in the current state of lookism and beauty premiums.

Because the beauty premium currently exists, women have integrated tactics to manage the lookism they experience. There is evidence that personal grooming habits contribute significantly to the beauty premium, which, while not ideal, does allow the woman some opportunity to shift her wages by manipulating her mutable features (Hooley & Yates, 2015; Wong & Penner, 2016). Certainly, some beauty is a result of genetics; however, a woman's overall attractiveness can be enhanced using wardrobe, hair styling, or make-up techniques, allowing women to either empower or exploit the lookism they experience (Hooley & Yates, 2015). In their research, Wong and Penner controlled for immutable features (characteristics that are genetic and thus unchanging). They found that grooming (e.g., personal hygiene, use of cosmetics and beauty products, hairstyles, and wardrobe

choices) contributed ". . . a substantial portion . . ." to the beauty premium (see figure 4) (Wong & Penner, 2016).

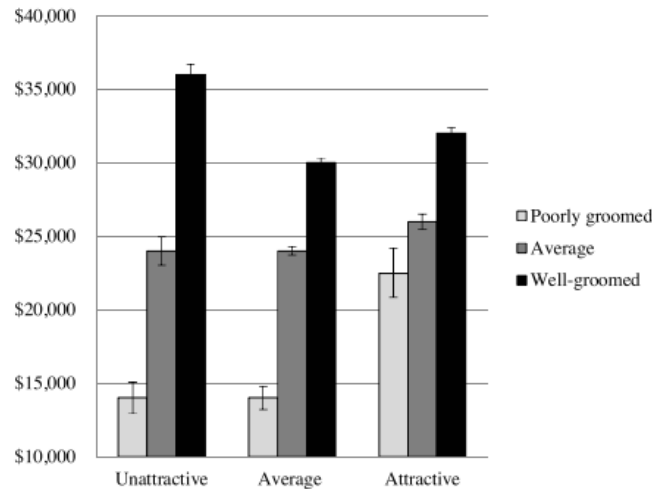


Figure 5. Wong and Penner's results on income normalized for grooming only – female respondents. Gender and the returns to attractiveness. Wong, J. S., & Penner, A. M. (2016). *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 44, 113–123.

A separate study concluded that the level of attractiveness or actual appearance was not the driver of the beauty premium rather found evidence that grooming or being "well-groomed" was the independent variable and accounted for a pay differential of 4-5% base salary (Robins et al., 2011). Unfortunately, adhering to social norms or expectations of appearance can intensify appearance-based discrimination and create additional barriers to equality in the workplace (Ramati-Ziber et al., 2019).

Rather than arguing against lookism in totality, one researcher argues that mutable features are the only features that an employer should be allowed to make decisions upon, either for hiring or compensation, because it is the employer's right to ask employees to conform with their ideal, mutable standards (e.g., flight attendants dress code) (Mason, 2017; Ramati-Ziber et al., 2019). This researcher continued the argument that women should ". . .

bear the cost of her choices. . ."; the bear the cost argument can be positioned as both the negative of not receiving favorable disparate treatment but also enjoying the disparate treatment if she actively participates in grooming to the employer's perceived standards (Mason, 2017). Thus, if women are subject to disparate treatment, they should be empowered (advised) to manipulate their appearance to exploit any potential advantages gained by appearance (Hooley & Yates, 2015). Again, encouraging women to take advantage of lookism risks legitimizing the practices and devaluing women's skills and experience as contributions to the workplace.

For non-appearance-conforming women, there are activities that women can perform to increase their compensation, such as earning additional qualifications or professional experience (Ford et al., 2018; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Wong & Penner, 2016). Each additional 1.5 years of education or experience the employee receives appears to delineate and increase the employee's earning potential. While not associated with the beauty premium per se, this phenomenon allows non-appearance conforming employees upward mobility within pay brackets (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994). However, another author argues that while beauty may be an initial advantage, attractive women will lag in earnings if they invest in ongoing development as an employee (Robins et al., 2011). Because of this potential to lag without professional development, women will need to develop a career plan with ongoing development to maintain any advantages initially gained by appearance.

While there needs to be more awareness of lookism and the beauty premium, there are positive indicators that the beauty premium is diminishing, with evidence of increasing managerial awareness that attractiveness is not related to productivity for specific roles; when assessing for an attractiveness bias in hiring staff for sales, data analysis or data entry roles,

researchers found that the managers studied were aware that attractiveness does not impact productivity for data analysis or data entry roles (Deryugina & Shurchkov, 2015). In fact, this study posits that there is a beauty "penalty" or a deduction in wages for being attractive and seeking analytical tasks or roles, while another study showed that for knowledge workers, qualifications are preferred (and compensated appropriately) to attractiveness (Deryugina & Shurchkov, 2015; Ford et al., 2018). Unfortunately, one of these studies identified a substantial beauty premium for hiring bargaining or transactional roles, thus establishing the ongoing presence of the beauty premium in client-facing occupations, which continues the occupational self-selection discussed previously (Deryugina & Shurchkov, 2015). Much like the varying results of the studies analyzed, the discussion of the existence of lookism and beauty premium is a debated topic with several differing viewpoints.

Alternative Perspectives

Contrary to the evidence assessed, an alternative argument for the beauty premium is that there is no correlation between appearance and compensation, but rather a confounding variable such as intellect (as discussed in the biased beliefs theme) or physical health (Kanazawa & Still, 2018). In a 13-year longitudinal correlation study questioning the existence of the beauty premium, researchers found no evidence for a positive relationship between attractiveness and wages; instead, they found evidence that "very unattractive" people earned more than their attractive counterparts (Kanazawa & Still, 2018). One of the limitations of this study is that there was no segmentation of occupation for the "very unattractive" people, which allows for the question of whether these below-average appearances are employed in analytical fields (see comments in discussion related to beauty "penalty")(Deryugina & Shurchkov, 2015). These researchers also studied the correlation

between physical health and wages and found evidence supporting a correlation between these two variables without exploring the relationship between health and appearance (Kanazawa & Still, 2018). Rather than directly questioning the beauty premium's existence, other researchers have questioned why disparate compensation practices are problematic for organizations.

Another challenge to the perspectives gathered in this paper is whether or not it is fair to ask employers to compromise their brand or culture (Mason, 2017). This alternate argument is that customers choose where they spend their money, and the business has the right to influence the customer decisions with whatever means available to them; thus, if employing attractive employees influences customers, organizations should be competitive in retaining their attractive employees (Chiang & Saw, 2018; Mason, 2017). The prevailing "at-will" employment environment in the United States generally allows employers a high level of discretion and autonomy in employee affairs (Friedricks, 2015). The balance between the employer's competitive autonomy' and employees' rights to not be subject to discrimination brings the question of legislative oversight in business operations (Friedricks, 2015).

Lastly, there is an argument to collapse appearance-based discrimination into gender discrimination and, thus, be subject to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (Friedricks, 2015). The proposition is that because there is a disparity in instances of lookism between the genders, appearance-based discrimination is, in fact, a variation of sexism favoring attractive women (Friedricks, 2015). The potential legal implications of arguing lookism as a form of sexism overlap with the managerial implications of this analysis.

Implications

To liken lookism to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act terminology, compensation discrepancies would be classified as "disparate treatment" or purposeful actions; however, another Title VII definition captures another discrimination phenomenon, disparate or adverse impact (Cavico et al., 2016). Disparate impact is when a neutral employment policy or action adversely impacts employees (Cavico et al., 2016). While appearance is not currently protected under Title VII, an implication for managers is that by not intervening in the disparate treatment relating to appearance, the employees are receiving an adverse financial or psychological impact related to real or perceived appearance-based discrimination.

Despite not being a Title VII protected class, there are reports of increased numbers of lawsuits against organizations based on appearance; these allegations are often included with other claims, such as gender or age; however, they are notably explicit in stating physical appearance as a complaint (Calvasina & Calvasina, 2017; Friedrichs, 2015). The increasing number of discrimination lawsuits explicitly stating appearance indicates a need for organizations to proactively increase their awareness and management of lookism as a risk management tool to decrease liability for the organization.

While appearance is not a legally protected class in the United States, the impacts of discrimination based on a protected or unprotected class may result in diminished performance or productivity in organizations (Dossinger et al., 2019; Friedrichs, 2015). For example, perceptions or practices related to interactions related to women's appearance may decrease the availability or access to the most qualified individuals for the role (Calvasina & Calvasina, 2017; Mason, 2017). This decrease in most qualified employees' availability may have the opposite effect of the biased belief that a specific appearance is needed to increase

role or task productivity (Kanazawa & Still, 2018; Liu & Sierminska, 2015; Mason, 2017).

Alternatively, from an employee's perspective, pressure to comply with beauty standards can put women's well-being at risk, which can also result in decreased productivity (Ramati-Ziber et al., 2019).

Recommendations

To address the managerial implications and, more importantly, address the risks associated with lookism and disparate compensation, the following four recommendations have been developed from insights gleaned from the evidence:

1. Develop internal management training that increases awareness of lookism and behaviors associated with lookism (Calvasina & Calvasina, 2017; Ford et al., 2018). This training should include skills for managers assessing capability or role suitability to decrease managers defaulting to the "beauty is good" heuristic (Ford et al., 2018).
2. "Blind" the hiring process as much as possible by assessing candidates using objective means such as skills assessments and resume reviews to determine compensation offers before the visual interaction with the candidates (Ford et al., 2018; Hooley & Yates, 2015; López Bóo et al., 2012; Mileva et al., 2016; Rosenblat, 2008). Blinding the hiring process would include limiting human resources or recruiting personnel's access to social media as part of their candidate review due to the likelihood of exposure to pictures of the candidates and the potential for subsequent lookism based on exposure (Dossinger et al., 2019; Galarza & Yamada, 2017).
3. Diversify the employee's exposure within the organization. One author argued that occupational sorting is a solution to minimize the beauty premium; however, this global solution is not feasible and has potential downsides, such as other forms of

discrimination or decreases in career satisfaction (Dossinger et al., 2019). A potential modification of occupational sorting is rotating through the organization's functional areas and gathering feedback on the employee from multiple managers and roles as input into promotion or role change conversations. Rotation and working with multiple functional areas (and corresponding supervisors) would diversify the perspectives on the employee's skills and capabilities, thus mitigating lookism by a specific manager (Ford et al., 2018).

4. Perform random diversity audits to confirm that functional areas contain appearance diverse staff that do not reflect the manager's preferences (Cavico et al., 2016). These diversity audits may be incorporated into other diversity validation activities the organization is performing and must be performed by staff independent of the manager or function area (e.g., Human Resources) (Cavico et al., 2016). Additionally, these audits need to observe all aspects of the organization with the potential for appearance-based discrimination, such as the hiring process or ongoing performance evaluation (Cavico et al., 2016).

Each of these recommendations can be implemented independently; however, effective management of lookism (and subsequent mitigation of beauty premium within the organization) will require a leadership commitment to address the underlying causes of the beauty premium. Upon this commitment, leadership should develop a company-wide implementation plan utilizing a combination of the recommendations. As part of implementing the recommendations, the organization should be aware of the limitations of this systematic review.

aLimitations

The most pronounced limitation is the argument that beauty is in the eye of the beholder and the inability to normalize the definition of beauty throughout the multiple studies analyzed. While there is evidence to indicate general standards of appearance, the presence of this variation allows for questioning these aggregated results' credibility. Similarly, the evidence evaluated for this analysis discusses predominantly Western European derivative aesthetics; thus, there is potential for differing findings in non-Western cultures.

The second significant limitation of this research is the potential for confounding factors in women's compensation. Isolating only appearance-related factors may prove impossible and would result in the findings of this analysis being biased or over-reporting the significance of findings. Examples of potentially confounding factors may include privileged backgrounds such as university reputations, networking activities, previous social relationships with the employee, or marital status effects.

Conclusion

One of the most profound statements found in the evidence relating to appearance-based discrimination is, "It has been easier to coat various forms of discrimination with the appearance of propriety, or to ascribe some other less odious intention to what is, in reality, discriminatory behavior." (Cavico et al., 2016). This statement summarizes the findings of this analysis, where arguments are rationalizing disparate compensation practices such as self-confidence or inherent success in a role. However, regardless of the perceptions or practices that pervade lookism, the evidence demonstrates there are compensation benefits to women who are or make efforts to be more attractive, and organizations have the incentive to enhance

productivity among all women in their workplace by making efforts to minimize the disparate treatment (Hooley & Yates, 2015; Yates et al., 2017).

Based on the findings from this systematic review, opportunities for future research include segmenting into alternative appearance or grooming standards (e.g., tattoos, piercings, non-natural hair colors), a deeper exploration of using grooming standards to exploit the beauty premium, more in-depth analysis of the beauty premium in specific roles, or studying the efficacy of the recommendations in different organizational settings. The results of such studies would further the management field by increasing awareness and developing effective solutions for the future prevention of lookism and beauty premiums.

References

References marked with an asterisk indicate studies included in the systematic review.

Allison, E. K. (1976). Sex-linked earning differentials in the beauty industry. *Journal of Human Resources*, 11(3), 383–390. <https://about.jstor.org/terms>

* Anýžová, P., & Matějů, P. (2018). Beauty still matters: The role of attractiveness in labour market outcomes. *International Sociology*, 33(3), 269–291.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580918760431>

Barnett-Page, E., Thomas, J., & Harden, A. (2008). Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 8, 45.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-8-45>

* Borland, J., & Leigh, A. (2014). Unpacking the beauty premium: What channels does it operate through, and has it changed over time? *Economic Record*, 90(288), 17–32.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-4932.12091>

* Calvasina, G. E., & Calvasina, R. V. (2017). Employer appearance and grooming standards: Legal, policy, & practice issues involving tattoos and body piercings. *ASBBS Proceedings*, 24(1), 136–142.

* Cavico, F. J., Mujtaba, B. G., & Samuel, M. (2016). Code words and covert employment discrimination: Legal analysis and consequences for management. *International Journal of Organizational Leadership*, 5(3), 231–253. <https://doi.org/10.33844/ijol.2016.60365>

* Chiang, C. I., & Saw, Y. L. (2018). Do good looks matter when applying for jobs in the hospitality industry? *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 71(December), 33–40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2017.12.001>

- * Deryugina, T., & Shurchkov, O. (2015). Now you see it, now you don't: The vanishing beauty premium. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, *116*, 331–345.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2015.05.007>

- * Dossinger, K., Wanberg, C. R., Choi, Y., & Leslie, L. M. (2019). The beauty premium: The role of organizational sponsorship in the relationship between physical attractiveness and early career salaries. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *112*(July 2018), 109–121.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2019.01.007>

- * Ford, R., Price, G., Hofmeyr, K. B., & Chiba, M. (2018). Brains versus beauty in the knowledge economy. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, *16*, 1–12.
<https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v16i0.897>

- * Friedrichs, S. (2015). Sexy sex discrimination: Why appearance-based discrimination is sex discrimination. *Journal of Corporation Law*, *40*(2), 503. <https://jcl.law.uiowa.edu/>

- * Galarza, F. B., & Yamada, G. (2017). Triple penalty in employment access: The role of beauty, race, and sex. *Journal of Applied Economics*, *20*(1), 29–47. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1514-0326\(17\)30002-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1514-0326(17)30002-8)

- * Graham, J. R., Harvey, C. R., & Puria, M. (2017). A corporate beauty contest. *Management Science*, *63*(9), 3044–3056. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2016.2484>

- * Hamermesh, D. S., & Biddle, J. E. (1994). Beauty and the labor market. *The American Economic Review*, *84*(5), 1174–1194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.94015-7>

- Harris, M. M., Lievens, F., & Van Hoye, G. (2004). "I think they discriminated against me": Using prototype theory and organizational theory for understanding perceived discrimination in selection and promotion situations. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 12(June), 54–66. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0965-075x.2004.00263.x>
- Hooley, T., & Yates, J. (2015). 'If you look the part you'll get the job': should career professionals help clients to enhance their career image? *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 43(4), 438–451. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2014.975676>
- Inman, M. L. (2001). Do you see what i see?: Similarities and differences in victims' and observers' perceptions of discrimination. *Social Cognition*, 19(5), 521–546. <https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.19.5.521.19912>
- Inman, M. L., & Baron, R. S. (1996). Influence of prototypes on perceptions of prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70(4), 727–739. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.70.4.727>
- * Kanazawa, S., & Still, M. C. (2018). Is there really a beauty premium or an ugliness penalty on earnings? *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 33(2), 249–262. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-017-9489-6>
- * Liu, X., & Sierminska, E. (2015). Evaluating the effect of beauty on labor market outcomes: A review of the literature. *IZA Discussion Papers*, 8526. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2613431>
- Long, A. F., Grayson, L., & Boaz, A. (2006). Assessing the quality of knowledge in social care: Exploring the potential of a set of generic standards. *British Journal of Social Work*, 36(2), 207–226. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bch307>

López Bóo, F., Rossi, M. A., & Urzúa, S. S. (2012). The labor market return to an attractive face: Evidence from a field experiment. *Economics Letters*, *118*(1), 170–172.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2012.10.016>

* Mason, A. (2017). Appearance, discrimination, and reaction qualifications. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, *25*(1), 48–71.

* Mileva, V. R., Jones, A. L., Russell, R., & Little, A. C. (2016). Sex differences in the perceived dominance and prestige of women with and without cosmetics. *Perception*, *45*(10), 1166–1183. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0301006616652053>

Mobius, M., & Rosenblat, T. (2006). Why beauty matters. *American Economic Review*, *96*(1), 222–235. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1257/000282806776157515>

* Oreffice, S., & Quintana-Domeque, C. (2016). Beauty, body size and wages: Evidence from a unique data set. *Economics and Human Biology*, *22*, 24–34. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ehb.2016.01.003>

* Ramati-Ziber, L., Shnabel, N., & Glick, P. (2019). The beauty myth: Prescriptive beauty norms for women reflect hierarchy-enhancing motivations leading to discriminatory employment practices. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000209>

* Robins, P. K., Homer, J. F., & French, M. T. (2011). Beauty and the labor market: Accounting for the additional effects of personality and grooming. *Labour*, *25*(2), 228–251. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9914.2010.00511.x>

Rosenblat, T. S. (2008). The beauty premium: Physical attractiveness and gender in dictator games. *Negotiation Journal*, 24(4), 465–481. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1571-9979.2008.00198.x>

Schein, E. H. (1990). Organizational culture. *American Psychologist*, 45(2), 109–119. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139013338.005>

* Wong, J. S., & Penner, A. M. (2016). Gender and the returns to attractiveness. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 44, 113–123. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2016.04.002>

* Yates, J., Hooley, T., & Bagri, K. K. (2017). Good looks and good practice: the attitudes of career practitioners to attractiveness and appearance. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 45(5), 547–561. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2016.1237615>