The Physical Attractiveness Phenomena By Gordon L. Patzer
(New York: Plenum Press, 1985, 308 pp., $39.50)

Physical attractiveness is an abstract, subtle, and important personal characteristic with far-reaching consequences. An individual's facial and bodily appearance provides a holistic and easily assimilated informational cue by which his or her counterparts unavoidably make personal inferences. In this sense, physical attractiveness is similar to occupational status. Both are among the first bits of information people acquire from new acquaintances, and both are used to form attributions about other personal characteristics.

Physical attractiveness presents an interesting cultural paradox. The saying that "beauty only runs skin deep" is a widely embraced cultural value. When confronted with an obvious attempt to use physical attractiveness for benefit, or when bluntly asked to state the degree to which physical attractiveness is used to make personal inferences, people will adamantly reject it or deny its usage. The other side of the paradox is that, in reality, physical attractiveness has an incredibly strong and pervasive impact on our lives, being used to make inferences of social power, intelligence, liking, expertise, and prestige. Because of this paradox, academics in the multitude of sciences in which physical attractiveness is inevitably operative did not begin to acknowledge or investigate this concept widely until the 1960s. Gordon Patzer's *The Physical Attractiveness Phenomena* offers a comprehensive and timely review of literatures on this topic from such fields as communication, marketing, law, education, psychology, medicine, sociology, and anthropology.

The main intent of this review is to select theory and methodology from these literatures that may be of significant value to marketing researchers and practitioners. Three topics from the book are selected for review. One is the methodological considerations that may clarify and improve the research procedures of marketing academics working in this area. This topic also provides an improved explanation for why physically attractive individuals generally have a greater ability to influence others. The second topic is the factors that may expand theory involving source credibility and physical attractiveness. A consideration largely overlooked in marketing is the internalization of expectations based on physical attractiveness. The final topic is the impact of this complex phenomenon on the perceptions and styles consumers bring with them to the marketplace.

Measurement

Though the author presents a complete discussion of measurement issues in physical attractiveness research, the organization leaves the reader somewhat frustrated. Three issues in this discussion may be of assistance to academicians working in this area. First, construct validity for physical attractiveness is low because of a lack of discriminant validity. The author's studies offer the only evidence of these validities. Using a multivariate analysis, he shows convergent validity of a sufficient magnitude, with correlations between rating and grouping measures above .70. However, raters apparently unable to discriminate between sexiness and physical attractiveness, despite a substantial effort to distinguish these concepts for respondents prior to measurement. Similar concepts, such as cuteness, may yield identical results.

Both test-retest and interjudge reliabilities are astonishingly high. High reliability between raters is of paramount concern because the principal measure used in physical attractiveness experimentation is based on truth-of-consensus. In other words, manipulations of physical attractiveness are based on prior evaluations of stimulus objects, such as facial pictures. Those stimuli selected for experimental implementation should feature low standard deviations around the desired mean levels of attractiveness. Despite interjudge variability in age, sex, geographic origin, education, and socioeconomic status, studies yield respectable reliabilities of no less than .49 and more frequently in the range of .80 to .90.

Overall, truth-of-consensus is a satisfactory measure of physical attractiveness. Given the usefulness of this concept to advertising and marketing theory, it would seem less than beneficial to halt research because of an apparent lack of discriminant validity. An interesting parallel can be drawn between the measurement qualities of physical attractiveness and those of status or prestige. Both are pervasive, subtle, and unavoidable aspects of culture. Indeed, the author notes that children are able to make physical attractiveness attributions at 3 years of age. An entirely similar set of findings have been reported in the study of status or prestige judgments (cf., Alexander 1972; Baxter 1976). Interjudge reliabilities of status are high across a broad spectrum of educational and cultural characteristics, but it is never clear exactly what it is respondents are using as a basis for evaluation. Discriminant validity, in other words, is lacking for status or prestige as well. Physical attractiveness and status have been and should continue to be concepts employed in marketing theory. However, both are so abstract and subjective that academicians may never explicate conclusively the thorny issues surrounding discriminant validity.

A second methodological issue Patzer brings to light is the use of multiple stimulus objects within levels of physical attractiveness manipulations. Using a single facial picture for a low attractiveness manipulation, for example, leaves the potential for error due to some unique characteristics of that face. This experimental error is avoided by selecting at least two stimuli per treatment and comparing their effects within the design. The author's review yields no citations of studies with this degree of thoroughness. A natural progression in marketing's advancement of physical attractiveness theory would take...
heed of this methodological issue.

Finally, a third issue that may lead to an improved understanding in marketing is derived from finding consistently low correlations between a truth-of-consensus measure of an individual and that individual's ratings of his or her own attractiveness. These correlations are repeatedly low (e.g., .17) or nonsignificant. The general finding is that individuals of moderate attractiveness (as rated by others) consistently overestimate in their self-perceptions, whereas the truth-of-consensus measure correlates highly with individual perceptions when the person is highly attractive. Perhaps because of the fact that women receive more feedback about their attractiveness, moderately attractive men are the most predisposed to overestimate.

The idiosyncracy of individual perceptions helps in understanding why highly attractive sources generally wield greater influence. Theory and intuition suggest that individuals are more susceptible to influence by people whom they feel are like themselves (i.e., referent power). Given that the distribution of truth-of-consensus measures of the physical attractiveness of all individuals would be approximately normal (i.e., an objective assessment), the entire distribution should not react similarly to someone of a particular level of attractiveness. In other words, an individual of supposed moderate attractiveness should most identify with a communicator of moderate attractiveness. However, self-perceptions are not normally distributed; the distribution is highly skewed to the right. Thus, the majority of people in general identify with highly attractive spokespersons because the majority think they are more than moderately attractive.

**Physical Attractiveness and Advertising**

Marketing studies have been far from conclusive in establishing the causal relationship between physical attractiveness and source credibility or persuasion (e.g., Baker and Churchill 1977; Debevec and Kernan 1984; see Joseph 1982 for a review). The theoretical impetus, supported by research in many fields, is that individuals of higher physical attractiveness receive more positive attributions of trustworthiness, liking, and expertise than individuals of lower physical attractiveness. These three concepts are the strongest determinants of source credibility and, in turn, persuasion. In an advertising context, studies have confirmed the hypothesized relationship inconsistently, depending on the sex of spokesperson and receiver and on the type of product advertised. For instance, the results of one study suggested that an unattractive female spokesperson may be more persuasive with a male audience when the product is not of a romantic orientation (Baker and Churchill 1977).

Patzer's book provides a possible explanation for these findings. Specifically, the book repeatedly cites the strong cultural norm of beauty lying only skin deep. Though people emphatically deny being influenced at all by physical attractiveness, their attitudes and behaviors are affected more frequently than not. For instance, physical attractiveness remains a major determinant of romantic attraction regardless of elapsed time, number of meetings, and competing negative information. Similarly, studies show that individuals of higher physical attractiveness tend to receive positive work evaluations even when their performance is below par.

In those cases in which individuals are able to perceive that high physical attractiveness is being used purposefully for advantage, they may actually react more negatively than they would to a stimulus of low or moderate physical attractiveness. For instance, Patzer cites studies demonstrating that sentencing given for various crimes is generally more lenient for defendants of higher physical attractiveness. However, when jurors and judges perceive that the defendant has capitalized on high physical attractiveness to commit crimes (e.g., embezzlement, swindling), sentencing is actually more severe than for defendants of lesser attractiveness. A similar mechanism may be operative in advertising. When spokespersons of high physical attractiveness are used in advertising in a manner that increases the likelihood of the audience even subconsciously perceiving attempted manipulation, the reaction may be negative. This reaction may occur if the sex and attractiveness of the spokesperson do not fit the context. To avoid affronting the audience's attitude toward physical attractiveness, advertisers must thoroughly evaluate the norms surrounding usage of products. Advertising showing beautiful women in suggestive poses with plumbing or automotive supplies may backfire because it cues the audience and violates the norm. Cognizance of this awareness perspective may lead to a better developed and more explanatory theory of the relationship between physical attractiveness and source credibility.

One chapter of the book is devoted to a description of a study conducted by the author. In this research a spokesperson's sex and physical attractiveness were varied in print advertising for a pain reliever. The results indicated that regardless of spokesperson sex, physical attractiveness was associated positively with measures of expertise, trustworthiness, liking, and persuasion. Apparently the attractiveness manipulations were below respondents' awareness threshold. Future research should expand the various product-sex variations, allowing more successful use of physical attractiveness in advertising. In addition, the author suggests several other important manipulations for future research including type of appeal (i.e., fear, hypothetical versus two-sided, and conclusion drawing) and type of medium. Little is known about the potential effects of sponsor-source interactions. Indeed, sponsor and source are two separate entities in most advertising. A host of questions arise about how viewer perceptions of the sponsor (e.g., trust, prestige, liking) may interact with the physical attractiveness of the spokesperson.

Investigations of the determinants of physical attractiveness also may be of value to advertising researchers. Regardless of the sex of the viewer, upward of 60% of the variation of physical attractiveness is explained by face and weight. One study found that for a male stimulus, face explained 50% of the variance and weight 10%. The contribution of these determinants was just the opposite for the female stimulus, where 50% of the variation was explained by weight and 10% by face. Research also suggests that because of the greater emphasis placed on the physical attractiveness of women in our culture, both male and female judges have better defined stereotypes of ideal attractiveness for women than for men. Together, these findings imply that a wider variation of physically attractive men than women may be employed successfully in advertising. When a female spokesperson is used, a full body view seems to have the greatest possibility of capitalizing on physical attractiveness, whereas for a male source a facial picture appears most beneficial.

**Internalization of Physical Attractiveness Expectations**

Socialization causes individuals to internalize the normative expectations forthcoming from their levels of physical attractiveness. Expectations, in effect, lead to self-fulfilling prophecies. Research has shown that in comparison with individuals lower in physical attractiveness, those higher have more dates, more friends, happier marriages, less social anxiety, greater individuality, and greater levels of social adjustment. For example, grade school teachers have expectations of greater intelligence and performance for children of high physical at-
tractiveness. These children then internalize these expectations, eventually becoming higher performers than their classmates.

In general, people higher in physical attractiveness tend to have more positive social interactions than those lower in physical attractiveness. Because social interactions are inevitably a dimension of consumer behavior, attractiveness may have a significant impact on satisfaction, complaining behavior, browsing, and consumer-salesperson interaction. For instance, both men and women of low physical attractiveness tend to be more assertive and aggressive than those of high physical attractiveness. This relationship may be of significant value to researchers working in the area of consumer complaining behavior and satisfaction. There may be a strong correlation between physical attractiveness and measures of both consumer aggressiveness and assertiveness (Richins 1983). Levels of satisfaction resulting from customer-salesperson interactions may be explainable by considering the physical attractiveness of both parties.

Summary

Patzer’s book demonstrates the pervasive effects of physical attractiveness on our lives by drawing on numerous and widely differing literatures. Several findings in these literatures are of potential benefit to the discipline of marketing. The book will be of tremendous value to researchers interested in physical attractiveness as a marketing phenomenon.

In the final chapter, Patzer goes as far as to suggest that physical attractiveness is deserving of its own separate discipline, which he titles “papology” (i.e., science of physical attractiveness phenomena). The author has taken an initial step toward providing the recognition worthy of the physical attractiveness phenomenon.

SCOTT A. DAWSON
Portland State University
Portland, Oregon

REFERENCES


Marketing Ethics—Guidelines for Managers
By Gene R. Laczniak and Patrick E. Murphy
(Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, Lexington Books, 1985, 175 pp., $19.00)

A book on marketing ethics has long been needed. This one may not be the ultimate—what first book ever is?—but it makes an excellent start. The authors attempt at the outset to provide an intellectual foundation and then proceed to address specific ethical issues in the subareas of marketing.

The book covers a great deal of ground in a straightforward and lucid manner. Each chapter describes the ethical issues involved, provides a historical perspective, and offers a discussion of how to deal with the ethical issues. The authors also provide examples of actual situations in which ethical dilemmas arise.

In the lead article, T. R. Martin, former Dean and currently Professor of Management at Marquette, discusses the role of ethics in business. He emphasizes the importance of ethics in making ethical decisions, and the need for managers to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to make ethical decisions.

The second article in the book is entitled, “Frameworks for Analyzing Marketing Ethics.” In it Laczniak is searching for the underpinnings of the foundation upon which a generally acceptable system of ethics can be laid. He is looking for the foundation of a system of marketing ethics, but I think the answer would be the same for medical, legal, or political ethics.

From my experience Laczniak has taken on the most difficult, if not impossible, assignment. In a heterogeneous and widely diverse society such as ours, how does one find common ground on which to base a system of ethics? Yet, if one cannot find such a foundation, all that follows is building on sand.

Laczniak looks to philosophers in his attempt to find a framework. He discusses briefly, and rejects, the principle of utilitarianism (the greatest good for the greatest number), Kant’s categorical imperative (so act that you could wish your individual act to become a universal law), the golden rule, and a couple of other less known tests of ethics as being too simplistic. I was slightly surprised that he discarded the utilitarian principle so casually because it seems to me that in a free market economy this is, and is often espoused as, the arbiter of