Ethics concerning physical attractiveness phenomenon: business strategy versus research knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Management strategy for businesses and not-for-profit organizations can benefit from application of knowledge generated by scientifically credible research; which academicians conduct, present at professional conferences, and publish in scholarly journals. A hypothesis that merits substantial study regards the question, whether management strategies of real-world organizations of all types utilize enough of the knowledge produced by academic researchers?

Consider physical attractiveness phenomenon. First, it is legal to differentiate/discriminate based on a person's physical attractiveness, if related actions do not conflict with personal factors protected by federal law. Second, physical attractiveness exerts significant impact throughout a country's population and throughout a person's life, whether fundamentally defined as how pleasing someone or something looks or operationally defined in research terms of respective variance, standard deviation, and mean values. Accordingly, it is one dimension of a person's appearance with influence far greater than usually recognized or admitted. Findings from scientifically credible research conducted in convincing quantity and quality, published in respected, diverse, scholarly journals, recurrently document its impact and influence.

Bottom line finances indicate that utilizing research knowledge concerning physical attractiveness phenomenon is advantageous. But ethical issues arise. To do so can be problematic. Despite this particular knowledge generated by solid scientific research, the realities discomfort many. And, codes of ethics generally rule out actions that cause mental harm. Also, inflammatory opposition can arise from some customers, some potential customers, and some members of the public.

Key words: ethics, strategy, research, physical attractiveness phenomenon

INTRODUCTION

Research conducted by academics in a diverse list of disciplines and published in respective and respected scholarly journals robustly document benefits of higher physical attractiveness and detriments of lower physical attractiveness. These benefits and detriments occur somewhat analogously for males and females. Although populations are certainly changing in these regards, most countries and cultures still maintain a double standard with physical appearances being more important for women than men. With relative rare exceptions that do not disprove the rule, the general and overwhelming "rule" identify by research is that individuals themselves whose appearance represent higher physical attractiveness experience benefits throughout life while individuals of lower physical attractiveness experience rather parallel throughout life. In-turn, other people around these individuals, ranging from co-workers to subordinates to customers and potential customers, are corresponding influenced positively and less positively or negatively by these individuals of higher and lower physical attractiveness.

Business people, particularly in marketing, management, and human resources, encounter substantial resistance, opposition, and even disdain when they attempt to employ such scholarly documented knowledge. Even though it is legal in practice, and no doubt practiced privately every day across the United States and around the world by individuals and societies, when it becomes known in connection with a business' policy or practice, substantial resistance arises quickly. The situation that arises represents a dilemma between managerial actions that reflect likely profitable business strategy and ethical questions about promulgating a real but a difference in society between individuals based on whether they are so-called good looking or not as good looking that people are generally uncomfortable to acknowledge. Furthermore, even if a business practice is legal and represents prudent strategy to benefit stakeholders, codes of ethics (as well as legal restrictions) generally rule out procedures that cause mental harm.

Within this context of ethics, marketing actions need to take into account the strategic applications of physical attractiveness phenomenon to persuade people when research knowledge documents that more physically attractive communicators might be more effective. Inherent in ethical and social responsibility ideals, not using certain knowledge might be the preferred choice. An example might be when scholarly research knowledge confirms that people with certain appearance factors (e.g., high physical attractiveness) are most effective when attempting to persuade other, which ten allows them to realize benefits that people less effective at persuading (and, thus, less physically attractive) do not reap.

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCED BY SCHOLARLY RESEARCH

It is reasonable to identify mid-1960s as the start of scholarly research, i.e., scientific research explicitly investigating physical attractiveness phenomenon, which continues today and will no doubt continue far into future. Researchers have discovered a wealth of data, information, and knowledge as reported in thousands of directly and indirectly related studies published in scientific journals that span wide-ranging disciplines. Numerous scholarly books have synthesized and summarized significant portions of the published scholarly research (e.g., Hatfield and Sprecher, 1986; Etcoff,

1999; Patzer, 2006). The collective research contains impressive depth and breadth of investigations, research methodologies, and consistency of discoveries about physical attractiveness. Continuous advancements of applicable research now permit studies of previously unforeseen variables, while increasing robustness of these investigations in terms of scope and methodologies.

One particular research project published early in the history of this formal research area carried a title that continues today to stand tests of time. Based on empirical data, the authors concluded as their title states, "What is Beautiful is Good" (Dion, Berscheid, and Walster, 1972). Now approaching four decades later, an overwhelming portion of scholarly research published since then in fields that include business and sub-fields of business, has generally tested and confirmed, while expanding and elaborating, this summary statement. For example, people believe that persons of higher physical attractiveness possess more socially desirable traits, live better lives, and have more successful marriages and occupations than their counterparts of lower physical attractiveness (Dion, Berscheid, and Walster, 1972). More precisely, people "assume that good looks are instrumental to leading a socially and sexually exciting life" (Bassili, 1981). Accordingly, they are perceived as "more sociable, dominate, sexually warm, mentally healthy, intelligent, and socially skilled" (Feingold, 1992). To either further support or disconfirm these findings, another study, larger in size and employing different research methodology was conducted in a separate national survey in the United States (Berscheid and Walster, 1972). Their findings corroborate other findings about people of all ages believing this stereotype. The research participants expressed invariable belief that persons of higher physical attractive obtain more happiness, have more sex, and receive greater respect than those of lower physical attractiveness.

Prior to the 1960s, research communities did not address physical attractiveness in systematic business research or pertinent social science research, at least not beyond individual characteristics such as personality traits as a function of height, weight, hair color, eye colors, and length of nose. Even slower to develop was study pertaining to the potential differences between individuals of lower and higher physical attractiveness. In the mid-1960s, Mills and Aronson conducted the first published empirical inquiry into physical attractiveness phenomenon (Mills and Aronson, 1965). That study investigated the relationship between changes in opinion held by a receiver exposed to a persuasive message, as a function of the physical attractiveness of the communicator of that message.

In a separate research undertaking in the late 1960s, Aronson offered an explanation about scientists' hesitation to research this topic:

> "…it is difficult to be certain why the effects of physical beauty [physical attractiveness] have not been studied more systematically. It may be that, at some level, we would hate to find evidence indicating that beautiful women [people] are liked better than homely women [people are liked] — somehow this seems undemocratic. In a democracy, we like to feel that with hard work and a good deal of motivation, a person can accomplish almost anything. But, alas (most of us believe), hard work cannot make an ugly woman [person] beautiful. Because of this suspicion, perhaps most social psychologists implicitly would prefer to believe that beauty

> [physical attractiveness] is, indeed, only skin-deep — and avoid the investigation of its social impact for fear that they might learn otherwise" (Aronson, 1969).

Beliefs are great concerning assumed benefits, and detriments, of higher and lower physical attractiveness in the workplace. As well as for women, perceived social and economic benefits of good looks in men has become driving forces for completely new types of cosmetic surgery. The author of a book published in 2001 reports that 34% of all male Wall Street brokers have undergone facial surgery, which is a rather extraordinary percentage given the overall youthfulness among this field to begin with (Luciano, 2001). Athleticism and health clubs have proliferated under the guise of improved health, but the manifest interest is improved appearance. This same author even states that men have essentially caught up with women in that, "everyone has become an object to be seen."

A 2004 headline article published by *The Wall Street Journal* offers some collaboration about the changing importance of appearance for men in the workplace. That headline read, "From Faux Clefts to Implants, [Cosmetic] Procedures for Men Surge; [Despite] The Risks of Nerve Damage" (Saranow, 2004). That article reports data from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons revealing that the number of males receiving cosmetic chin augmentations in 2003 was 600% more than 1992 and, in 2003 alone, the number increased 70% (to 9,583) from the prior year. Less perilous but equally permanent and nearly equal in popularity for males and females, the incidence of tattoos to enhance appearance has also soared in the United States. Accordingly, some major American corporations, notably Ford and Wells Fargo, now have policies "that allow body art as part of their appearance codes" (Ramachandran, 2005). More changes can be expected as younger employees advance into higher level positions, since, as revealed by a Harris Interactive study, the largest segment of the population with tattoos are twenty-five to twenty-nine year-olds, with 36% of these individuals sporting at least one tattoo.

RESEARCH INTO PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS

Physical attractiveness is a variable not easily studied. Defined as how pleasing someone or something looks (Patzer, 2006), it is one dimension of a person's appearance with influence and impact greater than recognized, expected, or admitted. As such, the level or amount for any individual person is somewhat subjective and people generally refuse to admit they respond or interact differently with people of different levels of physical attractiveness and/or they are not aware of it. In response, academic researchers use experimental research designs and observational research procedures more frequently than survey methodologies.

Determinants of physical attractiveness are many, encompassing both physical and non-physical factors. To study this variable in ways standard for manipulating or controlling experimental treatment variables, researchers procedurally have judges, separate from the research subjects, rate physical attractiveness of stimulus persons. These ratings serve as the basis to operationally define physical attractiveness for each stimulus person as high, moderate, or low, based on variances (standard deviation values)

and mean values of those ratings. Despite adages about beauty-in-the-eye-of-the-beholder, there exists much agreement between beholders.

Surrounding and inseparable from physical attractiveness is "Physical Attractiveness Phenomenon." As defined by Patzer (2006), it is the collective realities of appearance as distinguished by, or aligned with, physical attractiveness. Physical attractiveness phenomenon is the environment and apparatus that transforms physical attractiveness into a value that can be a blessing or curse, asset or liability, benefit or detriment. Applied to people, physical attractiveness phenomenon is the collective realities of a person's appearance as distinguished by, or aligned with, a person's physical attractiveness. It surrounds, permeates, and includes everyone with impact that spans lives, from birth to death. The impact of physical attractiveness phenomenon is pervasive and powerful, and as with physical attractiveness, its impact or influence is often unrecognized, unknown, or not admitted and denied. Finally, according to Patzer (2006), physical attractiveness phenomenon occurs as a progression through a circular four-stage process that begins with use of physical attractiveness as an informational cue.

Research into physical attractiveness goes beyond its value for people, and extends into areas of tangible products. For example, although physical attractiveness phenomenon terminology is not common among business magazine analysts, the 2005 cover story in *BusinessWeek* about that year's competition for these awards stated: "The [product] winners were simple, elegant, and often beautiful" (Nussbaum, 2005). Globally, that year's awards showed that "Beijing spent millions of dollars on design, turning out thousands of design graduates each year." Consumer preferences and their marketplace decisions are driving the escalating importance that businesses now place on product design to improve appearance/physical attractiveness as well as functionality. These developments are driving university business schools to infuse their students, the future business leaders, with knowledge and skill about product design that includes focus ultimately on product physical attractiveness. The August 1, 2005 cover story of *BusinessWeek* titled "Get Creative: How to Build Innovative Companies" (Nussbaum, 2005) includes an article titled "Tomorrow's B-School? It Might Be a D-School" (Merritt and Lavelle, 2005) about the importance to teach design school thinking and training to business school students. An article published by the *Wall Street Journal* verified or at least paralleled the greater value for higher physical attractiveness in business and products as measured by consumer purchases and company sales:

> Aesthetics hasn't always been a priority. Indeed, many wire-management gadgets were originally developed…[with] more concern about price and capacity than aesthetics. But lately, [manufacturers and stores] whose sales have risen 40 percent a month…are increasingly designing/selling visually attractive new ways, including new wireless technologies, to hide or eliminate such disarray of wires and cords (Kalis, 2003).

KNOWLEDGE USED BY BUSINESS EXECUTIVES

Business people who use knowledge pertinent to all disciplines revealed by academic researchers might be relatively few compared to the amount of academic research conducted, written, and published. But there certainly are business people who

use or attempt to use the research knowledge documented by academicians concerning physical attractiveness. A recent example that rose to public attention was reported in 2009 by the national newspaper in Canada, *The Globe and Mail* .That articles published both in paper-and-ink hardcopy and online electronically by the newspaper states:

> "Last week, Gawker.com reported that Dov Charney, founder and CEO of American Apparel, had ordered that all the less attractive people who work for the company be fired because, according to an anonymous store manager quoted on the site, "he feels they may be hurting his bottom line" (McGinn, 2009).

Although the country headquarters of American Apparel, controversy concerning use of physical attractiveness knowledge identified by academic researchers is not limited to companies or to people in the United States. These situations are quite universal. When business people attempt to implement knowledge about physical attractiveness discovered by academic researchers within their organizations, either in marketing, management, and/or human resource management policies and procedures, these particular actions routinely encounter substantial opposition from employees, customers, and the adjacent public.

Consider when the management of Malaysian Airlines Systems (MAS) made public their related long-term but previously unpublicized company policy. Due to appearance factors specific to physical attractiveness, MAS policy forced their company's female flight attendants to "retire" at age 40. (Male flight attendants, however, had no such appearance considerations. In fact, MAS policy permitted them to stay on the job until age 55.) Dr. Mohammed Don Abdullah, the airlines general manager, defended this policy by postulating, "Customers prefer to be served by young, demure and pretty stewardesses" (Ramachandran, 2003). In response, in the *Straits Times*, Kuala Lumpur newspaper columnist Vasanthi Ramachandran compared this policy to the treatment afforded ballerinas. "In a nutshell, the simple message from this prominent senior officer is: "Go home. You are old. You are no longer attractive. We do not need you anymore." In response to that criticism, Dr. Mohammed replied that the airline needs "frontliners who are mentally and physically alert; young, pretty and quick to respond to emergencies, as the safety of passengers is our priority."

A similar marketing strategy that emphasizes the importance of physical attractiveness for women has been alleged and criticized against the giant international cosmetics manufacturer, L'Oreal USA, Inc. (Ofang, 2003). Elysa Yanowitz, a former mid-level manager, asserted that the company forced her from her job as a regional sales manager after she refused her boss's directive to fire a sales associate because who was "not good looking enough."

In the United States, one company with highly visible policies or practices concerning use of academic research knowledge about physical attractiveness in corporate strategy is Abercrombie & Fitch. Straightforward observations of in-store personnel of this upscale retailer of trendy clothes, as well as anecdotal data in the form of conventional wisdom, customer comments favorable and unfavorable, newspaper articles, and complaints by ex-employees, all readily offer apparent verification. It is easy to conclude that the company differentiates between employees and potential

employees (i.e., job applicants) in manners consistent with physical attractiveness phenomenon knowledge, ranging from sales clerks/sales associates to company executives to casting models in its advertisements. Legal proceedings against the company offer formal, albeit less straightforward, verification of its practices in this area and their substantial opposition.

Legal proceedings against Abercrombie & Fitch specific to its business policies and practices concerning physical attractiveness regardless of their gender began with a formal lawsuit filed against the company in 2003 (Cassidy, 2003; Greenhouse, 2003). Ultimately, the company agreed to pay US$50 million to settle this lawsuit out-of-court (Associated Press, 2004; Chavez, 2004; *USA Today*, 2004). Among claims and counterclaims in this legal matter, it is meaningful to consider a few probable facts as reported in a CBS Television network news program (Greenhouse, 2003). As court testimony expressed:

- Two former managers at Abercrombie & Fitch report the company was "after a certain look [of physical attractiveness] for their sales force, and the less a salesperson had of this look, the less they worked."
- One former manager states: "I was sick of getting my schedule back every week with lines through names. I can't look the people that work for me, that want to be there, in the eye and lie to them and say we don't have hours [for you to work] when, really, it's because they weren't pretty enough."
- Another former manager identified to have worked earlier as a model states he "had a similar experience" concerning his superiors scheduling hours differently for his employees of higher and lower physical attractiveness. For himself, the news program reports, "he says his look [of high physical attractiveness] is what got him a job…it was 90 percent of it and your interaction with other people was 10 percent."
- A lawyer and radio talk show host who is African American defends the company's hiring practices based on physical attractiveness. He "likens [physically] unattractive people's failure to be hired by Abercrombie & Fitch to white people failing to be hired for on-air work by Black Entertainment Television: "There is a no-fly zone over certain people and certain industries that discriminate all the time." According to him, the Abercrombie & Fitch situation "is about a business deciding, pursuant to its own best interests, rightly or wrongly, that a particular type of salesperson is more likely to generate more dollars."
- The company denies any discrimination based on race or gender in their hiring practices, substantiated by the two former managers above when they say, "…what they saw was 'lookism' rather than racism. Applications from minorities were handled the same as a white person's. File it away in the yes pile to call back or in the no pile. The

> no pile was for applications of people whose looks [levels of physical attractiveness] she [the manager] knew wouldn't pass muster."

An article by the *New York Times* News Service substantiates the CBS Television network news program cited above (Greenhouse 2003). First, it quotes a former assistant store manager for Abercrombie & Fitch (separate from the two above managers) who states, "If someone came in with a pretty face, we were told to approach them and ask them if they wanted a job. [Central corporate management] thought if we had the best-looking college kids working in our store, everyone will want to shop there." Second, that newspaper paper article reports:

- "Abercrombie's aggressive approach to building a pretty and handsome sales force, an effort that company officials proudly acknowledge, is a leading example of what many industry experts and sociologists describe as a steadily growing trend in American retailing."
- "Hiring for looks [of high physical attractiveness] is old news in some industries. But many companies have taken that approach to sophisticated new heights in recent years, hiring workers to project an image. In doing so, some of those companies have been skirting the edges of antidiscrimination laws and provoking a wave of private and government lawsuits."

Policies and practices concerning human resources management as cited here represent just one plausible use of research knowledge about physical attractiveness within in for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. Another comparable use might be guidance in selecting marketing personnel for positions that range from highly visible sales work positions to equally visible casting of personnel in commercials. Beyond human resources management, applications of this knowledge might be pertinent for the very existence of an organization in terms of its products or services offered.

Organizations of all types frequently find substantial profits when providing products or services that provide a means or method to enhance a person's physical attractiveness. One indicator is a July 10, 2007, press release from the Publishers Information Bureau of the Magazine Publishers of America association (www.magazine.org), which reported expenditures for advertising in magazines for the category of "toiletries and cosmetics" to be the number one magazine advertising category. And, cosmetic surgery annually now surpasses the $20 billion business level in the United States alone (American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, 2004). It is accurate to conclude that regardless which specific aspect of physical attractiveness that an organization provides, beauty business is huge business (*The Economist*, 2003). The big business of the beauty business can be expected in the context documented by David Buss. His is research focusing on more than 10,000 people across 37 cultures concluded physical attractiveness to be at or near the top criterion in mating preferences in one way or another worldwide (Buss and Barnes, 1986; Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, and Larsen, 2001).

BOTTOM LINE REALTIES OF USING THIS KNOWLEDGE IN BUSINESS

However problematic or visibility distasteful it is for organizations to use academic knowledge about physical attractiveness, bottom line realities indicate it is good for bottom line financial considerations. Economists conducted a study in 2005 at the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis in the United States with results that corroborated principle findings about physical attractiveness phenomenon (Engemann and Owyan, 2005). For example, results from that that study revealed that higher physical attractiveness translates into higher pay such that employees of higher physical attractiveness earn more compared to their counterparts of lower physical attractiveness. Beyond these statistics, the study concluded that people more physically attractive might be better employees given differences in their self-confidence and their appeal and influence among co-workers and customers. The Economist

Other economists, at the University of Texas at Austin (Daniel Hamermesh) and Michigan State University (Jeff Biddle) have found analogous consequences aligned with physical attractiveness (Hamermesh and Biddle, 1994). Compared to earnings of persons of average physical attractiveness, their research revealed a "beauty premium" whereby persons of higher physical attractiveness earn 5% more and a "plainness penalty" whereby persons of lower physical attractiveness earn 9% less. Despite conventional wisdom that this physical attractiveness factor might apply only to certain jobs or industries, this research showed the differences across diverse occupations, not limited to any one type of position or industry.

Separate from the above research, these two economists found the same pattern of beauty premium for attorneys, ranging from 10% to 12% for those rated higher in physical attractiveness (Biddle and Hamermesh, 1998). Furthermore, lawyers rated higher in physical attractiveness most often entered private practice versus public practice. In this comparison, "Fifteen years after graduating, the beauty premium for private lawyers was three times that for public lawyers" (Engemann and Owyan, 2005). These differences in earnings, compensation, and other less quantifiable measures are understandable, albeit discomforting, in light of published research findings that focus on actual differences between people of higher and lower physical attractiveness rather than only documenting what others believe about these people. For example, that research reveals that people with appearances of greater physical attractiveness actually do possess more confidence and feel more entitled to better treatment than their counterparts of lesser physical attractiveness (*The Economist*, 2003).

Economists Susan Averett and Sanders Korenman found that obese women earned 17% less than women of average weight did; this pattern also occurred among men but with much less differential (Engemann and Owyan, 2005). Their research published in 1996 studied two age groups, sixteen to twenty-four years old and twenty-three to thirty-one years, in the 1980s. The benefits and detriments for weight and wages vary between demographics, but the pattern for people of heavier weights receiving lower salaries is most consistent for white women (Cawley, 2004). In terms of height, economists Nicola Persico, Andrew Postlewaite, and Dan Silverman found higher salaries are paid to taller people at rates ranging from 1.8% to 2.6% for every additional inch (Persico, Postlewaite, and Silverman, 2004).

The collective effect of the dynamics and consequences found above predict another broader finding reported in research by four Dutch and American economists (Schoenberger, 1997). Published by the National Bureau of Economic Research in Cambridge, Massachusetts, this research concluded, "Companies who hire beautiful people go on to make a pretty penny." They based their conclusion on the physical attractiveness ratings of 1,282 executives compared with sales revenues and profitability at their respective companies. The researchers found that companies with executives of higher physical attractiveness were "in most circumstances associated with higher revenues." Furthermore, they reported, "The productivity increase, while it's real, is because of co-workers' and customers' behaviors . . . it doesn't matter whether it's advertising or steel manufacturing, or radio," the relationship with physical attractiveness was found to be the same.

LEGAL REALITIES

For employment actions, the line is thin between legal and illegal employment practices concerning the physically attractive and much less physically attractive. It remains legal as long those in charge do not make judgment of physical attractiveness defined in terms of, or in other ways aligned only with or someway limited to, people according to race, ethnicity, color, age, or sex. Although the legal system in the United States addresses many dimensions of employment from hiring to promoting to retaining and firing individuals, "Hiring [only physically] attractive people is not necessarily illegal, but discriminating on the bias of age, sex or ethnicity is. That is where things can get confusing and contentious" (Greenhouse, 2003).

According to the director of the Los Angeles office of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "If you're hiring by looks [of high physical attractiveness], then you can run into problems of race discrimination, national origin discrimination, gender discrimination, age discrimination and even disability discrimination" (Greenhouse, 2003). Accordingly, the Commission office "has accused several companies of practicing race and age discrimination by favoring good-looking…people in their hiring," who were "good-looking young white people."

To remedy discrimination based on physical attractiveness through legal means is not impossible, but it is extremely difficult. The difficulty relates strongly to complexities inherent in constructing a standard definition of physical attractiveness as a tangible variable. Therefore, plaintiffs concerning employment discrimination most frequently articulate interrelated surrogate measures such as weight, height, and a list of protected-class demographic variables. The 2003 lawsuit against upscale retailer Abercrombie & Fitch illustrates murkiness that complicates efforts to challenge discrimination based on the level of a person's physical attractiveness. First, it is not (yet) illegal to discriminate in employment on physical attractiveness, even though former managers at Abercrombie & Fitch as well as legal experts and media commentators acknowledge the retailer takes explicit actions to hire good-looking people, and once hired, gives them more compensation than people who are less good looking. Second, the distinction as well as ability in the mind of many people to differentiate people based on their physical attractiveness is blurry at best. Accordingly, plaintiffs initially claimed employment discrimination based on physical attractiveness,

but they later shifted the claim to the protected-class demographics of race and ethnicity (Cassidy, 2003; Associated Press, 2004).

Formal resistance against discrimination in the workplace concerning a person's physical attractiveness is not new and is not yet resolved. In 1976, *U. S. News & World Report* published an article titled "Now, a Drive to End Discrimination Against 'Ugly' People" (U. S. News & World Report, 1976). In 1983, the same respected news magazine again published an article of similar content titled "Bias Against Ugly People" (U. S. News & World Report, 1983). Nevertheless, still today, "Employers are free to be unfair, says Bill O'Brien, a Minneapolis-based employment lawyer. Other than some protected classes, there isn't a great deal employees can do about it." (USATODAY.com, 2005.

CONCLUSION

Whatever the strategy advantages and disadvantages to use academic research knowledge about physical attractiveness, and whatever might be the public reaction and corresponding public relations issues, it remains legal. As discomforting as the practice might be, it continues to be legal for a company (for-profit organizations and not-for-profit organizations) to differentiate between people in alignment with their physical attractiveness. This differentiation, i.e., discrimination, is legal in connection to employees, customers, and potential customers.

For business executives, regardless in working to advance their for-profit or not-for-profit organizations, the use of scholarly research knowledge about physical attractiveness might be advantageous strategy for the bottom line financially. However, this specific application of knowledge generated by academic research can be problematic in that it is often discomforting to view differently, people of different levels of physical attractiveness. As consequence, opposition can arise among some customers, some potential customers, and some members of the public, which may then require the best skills of the organization's marketing skills.

Many areas of business can benefit from application of knowledge generated by academicians. Therefore, a hypothesis that merits substantial research regards the question: Do real-world business practices utilize enough of the knowledge produced by academic researchers? Research is needed on both sides of the so-called aisle or divide between academia and industry research to determine the amount or extent of academic research knowledge that industry uses, when and where it is prudent strategy, and what are related ethical considerations.

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