

## WOMEN'S PERCEPTION OF FADING BENEFITS FROM *BEAUTY PRIVILEGE STEREOTYPES*

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### ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of beauty privilege is closely related to the standardization of beauty in Indonesia, particularly within the context of the workplace. Stereotypes surrounding beauty privilege assume that individuals who meet conventional beauty standards or possess attractive appearances gain certain advantages, such as preferential treatment, ease in obtaining employment, or opportunities for promotion. However, current trends indicate a shift in perceptions regarding the benefits of beauty privilege. This study aims to explore working women's perceptions of the evolving meaning of beauty privilege and its role in the workplace. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, using convenience sampling. Data were collected through interviews with three female participants from diverse professional backgrounds. The findings reveal that while beauty privilege still exists in certain employment sectors, its advantages are gradually diminishing. There is now a growing emphasis on individual competencies in the workplace, accompanied by a growing awareness that physical appearance is no longer the primary determinant of professional success. One of the positive impacts of the fading influence of beauty privilege is the increased freedom to work without the pressure to conform to conventional beauty standards, as well as greater motivation to develop and optimize one's abilities. Furthermore, the decline of beauty privilege stereotypes helps reduce social envy among employees. These findings also reinforce the argument that skills are becoming the key factor in the workplace, although physical appearance may still play a supporting role.

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### INTRODUCTION

*Beauty privilege* has become a phenomenon that is often discussed on social media. This phenomenon is closely related to the beauty standards that apply in Indonesia. The existence of these standards forms the mindset that individuals must meet beauty criteria. Furthermore, *beauty privilege* also affects the world of work, where there is a stereotype that women who meet beauty standards tend to find it easier to get job offers, because they are psychologically easier to attract attention (Khoirunnisa, 2023).

*Beauty privilege* in the context of work is often associated with the stereotype that individuals who have physical attractiveness tend to be considered to have a better quality of life, thus influencing the perception and treatment

of others towards them (Rasyid, 2022). In addition, Khoirunnisa (2023) revealed that *beauty privilege* manifests a form of discrimination. First, direct discrimination, where women who are considered beautiful and attractive tend to receive preferential treatment, such as tolerance when it is late, ease of obtaining permission, and priority in expressing opinions. Second, indirect discrimination, women with attractive appearances tend to be prioritized in certain roles, *assistant managers* or become advertising stars (Khoirunnisa, 2023).

The phenomenon of *beauty privilege* in the context of work is not always an advantage for the recipient. Preferential treatment of individuals with attractive physical appearance in the work environment has the potential to cause social jealousy among workers (Mutaharah, 2023). On the other hand, there is also a negative view that women prioritize physical appearance which then gives rise to the stereotype that women's existence is only determined by their beautiful appearance. This phenomenon can have psychological impacts, such as feelings of *insecurity* and inferiority towards one's own abilities and anxiety about perceptions of others (Chinta et al., 2023; Rizkiyah et al., 2020).

Stereotypes that associate women's physical attractiveness with ease of work are often considered an undeniable truth. However, in the process of applying for a job, especially at the *first impression interview* stage, it still plays an important role, such as how to speak, behave, and interact. In line with that, physical appearance does not reflect a person's personality as a whole, but appearance can contribute as a good initial perception (Ayu, 2019).

In today's era, stereotypes about *beauty privilege* are beginning to be questioned. Nowadays, these stereotypes are not always beneficial for the recipient. The work environment is a space where everything related to the activities of several people, both employees, managers, institutions, and others, is done to achieve common goals (Aprilianty et al., 2023). Ford (2018) emphasized that although *beauty privilege* is still present in the work environment, skills and performance are now more prioritized factors. Thus, this study aims to describe how women's perception of the fading of benefits from *beauty privilege* stereotypes in the work environment.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with *convenience sampling techniques* (Creswell, 2018). The researcher determined three participants who were selected based on certain criteria, namely: (1) the participant was a woman; (2) participants are actively working, considering the focus of this study on beauty privilege stereotypes in the context of the work environment consisting of 3 people. Information related to the research was disseminated through social media X to get participants. The interview process was carried out face-to-face with a duration of about 35-55 minutes. The entire interview was recorded in audio form and transcribed verbatim. The data that has been obtained is analyzed to identify into categories using thematic analysis methods. Theme identification is carried out through the researcher's subjective interpretation based on the results of observations on the data which are then linked to relevant theories to produce a comprehensive understanding of the research findings.

## RESULT

**Table 1.1 Participant Demographic Data**

Subject	Age	Work
D	31	PNS
M	26	Private Employees
K	25	Teacher

The researchers managed to get three participants who met the research criteria. The three participants are women who are currently actively working and have knowledge and experience about beauty privilege stereotypes in the work environment. All three participants agreed that although *beauty privilege* is undeniable, in practice the performance of the individual remains a more prioritized aspect in the context of work compared to physical appearance.

Based on a thematic analysis of the results of interviews with three participants from diverse work backgrounds, the research findings were grouped into three dimensions of perception, as stated by Calhoun and Acocella (1990), namely knowledge, expectations, and evaluation. Each dimension is depicted in the following themes:

### **Awareness and understanding of beauty privilege stereotypes and their changes**

Participants showed an understanding of the concept of *beauty privilege*, especially in the work environment. They also realized that the advantages of *beauty privilege* in the realm of work had begun to fade, even though they were valid under certain conditions.

"Still, if it's beautiful and smart, it's a good job, then it applies to me. If the person is beautiful and the work is not good, there will be no benefit from her beauty. But the beautiful and the smart will outshine the less beautiful." (D)

"Depending on what the sector of work is, I think some jobs may still emphasize that, but overall it is not" (M)

"In my opinion, it's not relevant to discuss it". (K)

In addition, the participants realized that ability tended to take precedence over beauty.

"It's not too much now, but people are more interested in their performance, and they even like to be the subject of jokes if they are beautiful and don't have a job. It's not enough to be smart enough to be smart, beautiful, and to be a good person." (D)

"But mostly, if the company is really looking for quality people, beauty is not so important anymore, the important thing is to be neat and clean" (M)

"There are so many people or people now who have a more open mindset, whether it's their views on skills in work that are more important, or the understanding that for example beauty is relative." (K)

### **Expectations of beauty privilege stereotypes**

Some participants expressed a desire for values to be attached to women not solely based on appearance.

"According to me, through religious values, we must try to be fair, we should not be differentiating people just because of their appearance or other things. Through education too, through education becomes more open-minded, thus an example of leaders, especially the highest leaders, usually like to follow the leader because they want to be considered good with the leader, so the boss is very influential." (D)

"Setting standards and criteria when opening lockers is good, recruiters must look at someone's abilities regardless of appearance, provide equal opportunities and transparency during the recruiting process." (M)

"There are no specific SOPs or rules related to appearance. In addition, it is also a way for all organizations to collaborate and the same opportunity in a position or task, where this can be a forum to see the abilities of each person, not just limited to appearance." (K)

### **The impact of the fading of benefits from the stereotype of beauty privilege**

The evaluation dimension gave rise to reflections from participants about the impact felt when the benefits of *beauty privilege* began to fade.

"So it's free, because the important thing is that we work well according to the rules, it's not pretty. It's just that the appearance must be taken care of, it doesn't have to be beautiful but maintains the appearance, it is clean, neat, clothes do not get dirty. Sometimes even if we are too beautiful or too stylish, even if we are jealous of our fellow women, in fact, we want to "jajah" like that, the more difficult the matches (the competition)" (D)

"Yes, it's good, if possible, more and more people don't wear face masks for work conditions, because every human being has the right to get the same opportunity as long as they are able to work" (M)

"It's free, it's more flexible, plus the people around it are also not complicated. Especially when it comes to the work environment, it's not very strict and there are a lot of young people." (K)

## **DISCUSSION**

Stereotypes can be understood as a set of beliefs attached to a particular social group regarding characteristics that they believe they share in common. Stereotypes tend to lead to feelings of hostility in general, which will ultimately give rise to an intention to discriminate against the individual being targeted (Branscombe & Baron, 2023). Furthermore, stereotypes encourage individuals to pay more attention to specific information that is undoubted and relevant to these stereotypes (Sarwono, 2018). There are stereotypes circulating in society and it is believed that individuals who look attractive have a greater chance of being hired, promoted to be predicted to be more successful and receive better performance evaluations (Yonce, 2014).

Today, the stereotype that having a charming appearance receives special treatment has undergone a shift in meaning. Although appearance remains one of the aspects that are considered, individual abilities both from *the soft skill* and *hard skills* aspects are the main determinants. Khoirunnisa (2023) revealed that women with beautiful faces



often work harder to show their skills so that they are not considered to rely solely on appearance. This is also in line with the statement of Anýžová & Matějů (2018) that stereotypes of beauty privilege actually make charming individuals tend to be more intelligent, competent and even more successful because of high expectations so that they work hard and will ultimately be more successful

Perception is a person's way of forming impressions and drawing conclusions about others (Telford, 2008). In this study, the participants perceived that *beauty privilege* still occurs in the work environment. Nonetheless, they say that performance and competence remain the main determining factors rather than just physical appearance.

Referring to Calhoun and Acocella understand this phenomenon through the three dimensions of perception that form the concept of self. This dimension provides a framework to understand how women perceive in responding to changes in *beauty privilege stereotypes* in the world of work.

a. Knowledge:

Knowledge includes an individual's understanding of other people's understanding, including behavior, past experiences, emotions, motivations and other aspects. In this case, women are aware of *beauty privilege* as part of the dynamics in the workplace, especially in certain domains.

b. Hope

Hope is an individual's view of self-aspiration and an understanding of the ideal self that should be achieved. Participants showed that aspirations to be recognized on the basis of performance, rather than simply relying on physical attractiveness.

c. Evaluation

Evaluation is an assessment formed based on the extent to which individuals (according to themselves) meet the expectations that have been set. The participants showed confidence in expressing their abilities without the need to conform to the applicable beauty standards.

Based on this framework, women's perceptions of the fading of *beauty privilege* in the workplace are the result of the dynamics of knowledge, expectations, and evaluation. Participants were aware of the preferential treatment that tended to be given to individuals who were considered to have attractive appearances. However, this does not create pressure for them to follow the applicable beauty standards. Instead, they choose to be confident in showing their abilities through the best performance they can show.

All participants felt that there was a change in people's mindset driven by social media in increasing critical awareness of the stereotype of *beauty privilege*, where physical attractiveness was no longer seen as the main factor without being balanced with expertise, except in certain fields of work. The fading of *beauty privilege* has positive psychological impacts, such as a feeling of freedom at work and motivation to optimize hard work performance without the worry of being rivaled by individuals who are considered more physically attractive.

## CONCLUSION

The results show that women's perception of the benefits of *beauty privilege* stereotypes in the work environment has shifted. Although a charming physical appearance is still considered to have added value in certain sectors of work, all participants emphasized that skills and performance take precedence. This phenomenon reflects the awareness that visual appeal is no longer the main determinant in the professional realm. Changes in perception have a positive impact by increasing the sense of freedom to work without the pressure to conform to the prevailing beauty standards and the emergence of motivation to improve performance. Furthermore, the fading of *beauty privilege* reduces social jealousy in the work environment. Thus, the change in perception of *beauty privilege* makes the work environment more professional.

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