

## Another Type of Discrimination

*Topic:* Marketing Management, Advertising and Selling

*Characters:* Terry, Assistant Brand Manager  
Paula, Brand Manager for a floor scrubbing soap

Paula is a Brand Manager at a large consumer goods company. The position is one that Terry aspires to. Paula has spent the last six months working on an important new marketing plan for a floor scrubbing soap. Paula's superior has approved the plan and believes that successful execution of it would likely result in Paula's being promoted to a different, more desirable product line.

It bothers Terry that the marketing plan calls for the product to be associated with a series of spokespersons who are physically unattractive. She feels this plan promulgates a stereotype which results in discrimination that hurts people born with lower physical attractiveness. Paula (a very physically attractive young woman) feels strongly that persons of less physical attractiveness are the most credible for this product. In fact, Paula supports this notion with a specific article in a top marketing journal. The article reports empirical evidence showing that it is financially advantageous to use physically unattractive spokespersons when marketing mundane products (such as those for cleaning and cooking) and to use physically attractive spokespersons when marketing glamorous products (such as perfumes and [clothing]).

For a special college project, Terry had reviewed over 1,000 scientific studies pertaining to "the physical attractiveness phenomenon." She found ample documentation showing discrimination that is subtle, pervasive, and powerful. Specifically, attractive people are valued more by society than are those who are unattractive. She found that unattractive people are disadvantaged in employment, education, and throughout life. The differences are internalized, resulting in lower self-esteem, inferior social skills, and higher blood pressure. Other results include a significant role in the increase of eating disorders (bulimia and anorexia) as well as cosmetic surgery by people who often cannot afford it. Recently, Terry has read that this discrimination is becoming an increasingly important social issue with new developments that include boycotts and lawsuits.

Terry, a marketing major in college, has long been disturbed by marketing practices that promulgate the physical attractiveness phenomenon. For example, she has noticed that when comparative advertising is used, a physically attractive person is combined with the "right" product or the right choice and a physically unattractive person with the "wrong" product or choice.

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