

Attractiveness, Adornments, and Exchange

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Numerous studies have shown that being physically attractive is an enormous advantage (Adams, 1977; Cann, Siegfried, & Pearce, 1981; Langlois, Roggman, & Casey, 1987). Attractive individuals are better liked, get better jobs, have increased self-esteem, and have more social power as compared with unattractive persons. The average consumer does not have to read journals, however, to arrive at the same conclusion. In pursuit of attractiveness and its benefits, consumers engage in a wide range of consumption activities. Although attractiveness seeking is pervasive, relevant consumer behavior issues have been surprisingly underresearched. This special issue of *Psychology & Marketing* is meant to address this shortfall and provide motivation for other researchers to tackle issues pertaining to consumers' quest for beauty and use of adornments.

In seeking an organizing framework for investigating consumption and the pursuit of beauty, the notion of exchange appears promising. Nearly 20 years ago, Bagozzi (1975) suggested that exchange is the fundamental paradigm of marketing and consumption. According to this perspective, consumers and marketers exchange tangible and intangible entities in hopes that both parties will benefit. Both consumer and marketer recognize that beauty, as always, is a valuable commodity. Thus, marketers offer objects of beauty, such as artwork, architecture, and fabrics. With exceptional product design, even mundane goods such as telephones, tools, and kitchen appliances also can possess beauty (Sexton, 1987). Through the acquisition and display of beautiful goods, consumers may enhance their self-concepts as well as enjoy the aesthetic benefits these objects provide.

In addition to producing consumable beauty, marketers also offer goods and services that promise to directly enhance consumers' own

attractiveness. By using cosmetics and grooming aids, consumers hope to improve their appearance and receive positive social evaluations (Holman, 1981). By wearing adornment objects that are themselves inherently beautiful, such as jewelry or a colorfully patterned tie, the wearer's attractiveness is also enhanced.

In their exchange with consumers, marketers go beyond tangible objects and also provide images of beauty and its benefits (Tan, 1979). Advertising constantly reinforces the notion that physical attractiveness is a highly important characteristic. Such messages also suggest ways in which consumers may successfully increase their level of attractiveness. Perhaps most important are the images of beauty that fill advertising for adornment goods as well as many other products. Consumers are exposed to endless images of exceptionally attractive people that help shape standards of comparison and ultimately influence satisfaction with one's own attractiveness (Richins, 1991).

Looking at the other side of the exchange process, consumers offer financial resources in return for beauty. Spending for cosmetics alone accounts for \$20 billion per year (Wolf, 1991). Consumers also offer faith. In their exchanges, consumers subscribe to the belief that attractiveness is worthwhile and that it can be increased through consumption. In other words, consumers take the burden of beauty on themselves. They feel responsible for their ultimate attractiveness and look to consumption in discharging this responsibility. In expressing this faith, consumers invest considerable intangible resources in the pursuit of attractiveness. Time is devoted to the search for, selection, and use of beauty enhancing products and services. In using some products such as cosmetic surgery, consumers incur physical discomfort in trying to achieve a higher level of physical attractiveness.

Successful exchange implies that both parties receive perceived benefits. Marketers obviously gain from beauty-related exchanges. It is less certain whether consumers always benefit. When using adornments, a person may feel more attractive and experience improved self-worth. On the other hand, there can be negative outcomes of this exchange. When attractiveness alone determines self-worth or when consumers feel frustrated in the pursuit of nearly unattainable beauty ideals, the result of this exchange may be unpleasant for consumers.

Each of the five articles included in this special issue addresses elements relating to beauty-related exchanges. Barry Vacker and Wayne Key explore the heart of the exchange by discussing the nature and value of beauty itself. Drawing upon work from philosophy, they examine what constitutes beauty and how different perspectives may reveal themselves in consumption activity. They also provide a framework useful for other researchers to investigate a range of personal appearance phenomena.

Although the pursuit of beauty is an important force in contemporary society, individuals differ in their emphasis on personal attractiveness

and its meaning in their lives. Teresa Domzal and Jerome Kernan identify some personal characteristics that influence how people experience their bodies and use these dimensions to form a taxonomy of orientations toward the pursuit of beauty. This taxonomy provides a useful framework for the investigation of individual differences in the use of adornments and the meaning of personal beauty.

The pursuit of a beauty ideal is most explicitly advocated in advertising, particularly advertising for cosmetics and other adornment products. In the third article in this issue, Mary Martin and Patricia Kennedy use a social comparison framework to examine how preadolescent and adolescent girls respond to advertising images of beauty. Their study revealed age-related trends in the use of these images; self-esteem and self-perceived attractiveness were also shown to play a role.

The use of adornments themselves is examined in the article by Stacey Fabricant and Stephen Gould. These authors study one category of adornments—cosmetics—and use an interpretive approach to reveal in consumers' own words the effects of cosmetics on those who use them. The authors also address the notion of usage trajectories by examining how makeup usage changes over the life span.

A different sort of life-span perspective is provided in the article by Robert Schindler and Morris Holbrook, who examine individuals' tastes in personal appearance. Their analysis of consumers' reactions to appearance styles from a variety of eras suggests that appearance preferences are formed during critical periods in one's life and may be somewhat resistant to change. The authors discuss the implications of these preferences in designing marketing communications for age-defined target markets.

To conclude, we wish to thank the authors who submitted to the issue for their effort and interest. We also wish to thank Ron Cohen, editor of *Psychology & Marketing*, for suggesting and supporting this special issue. Finally, we would like to thank our reviewers, who improved the manuscripts with their insights and in many ways contributed behind the scenes to enhance the attractiveness of this issue.

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