

**Pretty Privilege In Education:
More Than A Body, More Than A Blonde**

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Abstract

This paper is set within the context of my life journey as a pretty-privileged model and social media content creator in teachers college. Through my life-journey, I have learned the effects of having a public social media platform with a large following and its relationship to preconceived expectations of a student's ability based on physical appearance. Based off discrimination by the way of identity, one example of this is the way I was removed from the Bachelor of Education program. I claim that teacher identity needs to be redefined, and the concern of prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory preconceived ideals based on stereotypes of women need to be addressed in the education system. I claim this because as a White, able-bodied, Catholic and cisgender female, I had a reputable image in my church community and surrounding geographical location — and it still was not enough to maintain credible status as an upcoming teacher. My career as a successful model undermined my abilities as an above average student; ultimately removing me from the teachers college program based on 'pretty-privilege' and sexual objectification as a woman. Although my career in the industry has provided the most amazing experiences, and funded my way through graduate school, my appearance and portrayal of body image was defined as my identity in a classroom setting. I advocate to redefine what the 'standard and ethical practices' of educators are, emphasizing that personal identity and image representation have nothing to do with professional or educational success.

keywords: pretty privilege, discrimination, stereotypes, generalizations, blonde, gender-sexualization

In memory of

Kamila Lebel-Farrell

September 28, 2001 – June 9, 2021

You were my first and best friend that I made at my initial job while embarking on my journey in my undergraduate degree, that prospered into a friendship of a short lifetime together. The radiance of positivity you instilled in everyone you met, along with your happy and joyful morals in which you lived your nineteen years of beautiful life by, are those that anyone could only hope to obtain. Your constant will for helping others, consistent determination to foster equality amongst all human beings, living life to its fullest and appreciating every little thing in this world, secured your place in heaven for an eternity with God. You were right my sweet guardian angel, the world does work in mysterious ways, and everything has played out for me as you said it would ... because we were spiritually in this together. I would not have made it this far if it weren't for your nudges in the right direction all these years. I love you every day, and I have missed you every part of this capstone journey — I will cherish your smile forever, I will carry your ray of sunshine with me wherever I go, and I will see you at every sunset.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

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Chapter One: Introduction

My experience in the Thompson Rivers University Masters of Education program provided insightful and meaningful knowledge through journal responses, personal reflections, analyses and application based assignments, along with light standardized testing. I was able to explore a variety of electives in my designated areas of study, and develop a professional learning community, in addition to demonstrating and sharing my passion for education.

Although I had never recognized myself as a feminist in the past, nor had any interest in gender studies, the core course at TRU, *Diversity: Constructing Social Realities* allowed me to thoroughly reflect, critically analyze, and understand my past experience from my previous institution; where I was sexually objectified as a female student, and removed from the Bachelor of Education program due to having images in a bikini visible to the public on my social media pages.

As a fashion model and social media content creator, the agency I signed with informed me of the potential dangers that the internet could exhibit. There were essentially three core marketing values that I was to follow, permitting me from discussing politics, religion, or any other personal statements I would be unable to retract in the future. I first learned about the term ‘pretty-privilege’ during my career in the industry, as it was a prime depiction of it. Although the industry deems models to be unique and diverse, the actual fixation is how the product looks on you or with you; therefore, the emphasis *is* on what you look like. Tall, thin, and having light skin, hair, and eyes are all physical traits that world-wide companies, agencies, and scouts seek out to be apart of their team — standing at 5’3 as a petite model, I already defied the ideal standards of beauty in the modelling industry. However, I did fit the ideal mould of a teacher — I

had the necessary training and education, followed proper teacher etiquette and a respectable dress code, embodied an ethic of care for each and every students learning needs, and maintained nearly perfect grades as evidenced in my lesson feedback by my associate teacher. During my third week at my placement, out of the four required as a teacher-student, my experience was cut short based off discrimination by way of identity, pretty privilege, and sexual objectification as a woman. The vice principal performed an alleged random google search of my legal surname, which differs from my modelling name, and found my Instagram username. There was no Chelsie Longstreet that could be found on the internet in trace to my modelling career; all that could be found were obituaries of my grandparents and old presentations from high school. Nevertheless, I was removed from the B.Ed. program because of posting photos in a bikini that were visible to the public, in which the principal deemed as ‘inappropriate.’

Aside from being a model and content creator, my hobbies included avid travelling and capturing images and Youtube videos to later reflect on as memories. I had also worked with swimwear companies in the past, which I could be seen modelling in on my feed. I had no shame in showing off the body I consistently worked hard for, and no desire to take photos on the beach in anything more than a bathing suit. As a woman, I have the inherent right over my body, and how I choose to present myself. Cash (1990) characterizes body image as the psychology of one’s body, describing it as an “inside perception.” In depth, body image refers to the emotions, beliefs, perceptions, and feelings about our body, and the way we see and feel about it (Cash, 1990). In my instance, I was confident in my body; confident enough to post images in a bikini, whether it was career-motivated or influenced by leisure activities. The issue was not my beliefs, feelings, or emotions towards my body presentation — it was the school principals, the associate

deans, and the practicum coordinators; who cooperatively decided that I did not fit the conventional teacher identity.

Significance and Purpose of Study

It is to my belief that the field of education is generally committed to bettering the lives of every individual — regardless of gender, social class, and race (Vyain et. al., 2014). However, that was not the case for me. The purpose of this paper is to expand the literature on pretty privilege and its relationship to discrimination by way of identity, while thoroughly analyzing its connection to a woman's physical appearance, and how it can undermine her academic success. The significance of this paper is that it will contribute to removing the barrier that a 'pretty' woman is not fit to be an educator, to further assist females in the education stream. There have been too many instances where I have been belittled with the "dumb blonde" joke, combined with the gender specific pretty-privilege identity I have as a successful fashion model. My intelligence is constantly questioned, in relation to my appearance. This study will focus on the notion of pretty-privilege in the education system, and its relationship to how woman with recognizable beauty can still reach high levels of education and success; despite their physical identity and portrayal of self image.

Theoretical Framework

Feminists have accomplished an abundance of women's rights movements over previous decades to include a more respectful approach to a woman's body image, but there is still a long way to go to promote a healthy acceptance of body image and portrayal, collectively, as a society (Becker, 1999). The role and imagery of being a woman has drastically evolved over the centuries; from being a modest, stay at home wife with no need for education, to becoming both

the beauty and the brains; having both mental acuity and physical beauty. When looking through a feminist lens, Taylor and Coia (2014), acknowledge that the interactions between education, age, gender and sexuality, geography, social affiliations, ethnicity and race, language, ability/disability, class, religion, and academic successes and obstacles have each been correlated to one's identity (Taylor & Coia, 2014).

To support the existing literature of attractiveness privilege as presented by Yonce (2014), I will be implementing a theoretical framework of intersectionality through a feminist lens, to determine the connection between gender and pretty privilege. This will also further my exploration of how inequality plays a role in generalizations and stereotypes based on a woman's physical appearance, which include standards of beauty, gender-specific sexual objectification experienced as a woman, and the portrayal of body image.

Presenting The Argument

In this paper, I claim that there is a link between pretty privilege and preconceived expectations of a student's ability based on physical appearance. This is grounded in my personal experience, and in studies including *Issues of Blondenness: Identity, Education, and Experience* by authors such as Blackston-Cail (2007). Their narrative inquiry study focuses on the lives of five women, who experienced negative stereotypes and generalization based on appearance throughout their successful careers. The research looks closely at hair colour in relation to identity, and the responsibility of social construction in regards to the development of this image (Blackston-Cail, 2007). Second, I claim that societal standards of physical attractiveness influence the ways in which people are perceived and treated both positively and negatively by others, as seen in literature by authors such as Yonce (2014). Their study highlights inequality

based on physical attractiveness, and it's existence through the beauty industry reinforcing this type of privilege through advertising. Lastly, I claim that a woman's body representation is her own choice, and has no relevancy to professional or educational success. To make such assumption, would be an aim to silence and humiliate women. Authors such as Cash (1990), Bordo (1993) and Brown (2017) each offer a different approach to examining how likability is judged and determined by physical appearance, in connection to how the female body is sexually objectified, while providing historical insight on the future of females in regards to body image and self-esteem.

How The Paper Will Proceed

This paper will proceed to critically examine the literature around the standards of beauty in relation to pretty privilege, pop culture and its effects on the sexual objectification on women, and predominantly, discrimination by way of identity caused by generalizations and stereotypes. I will be implementing a Qualitative application to analyze qualities and characteristics of individuals who have experienced these issues in their career. To support my findings, I will be furthering the knowledge obtained from authors such as Blackston-Cail (2007), Yonce (2014), Cash (1990), and Bordo (1995), to reflect a modern feminist approach on Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory. In the next chapter, I will present the contemporary literature to support my argument and better portray the meaning of attractiveness privilege.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

This chapter presents the current literature around different forms of discrimination by way of identity. My present work can be easily aligned within the categories of gender, privilege, and body portrayal, but the focus of pretty privilege, gender-specific sexual objectification, and body shaming in the education system will be new additions to this greater category. Contained within my review of literature, I have included works offering explanations of attractiveness privilege (Yonce, 2014), a comprehensive focus on generalizations and stereotypes surrounding women who have blonde hair (Blackstone-Cail, 2007), and analyses of standards of beauty; relevant to popular culture, body imagery, and the sexual objectification of women (Sampson, 2015).

Discrimination by way of identity: Pretty privilege.

The most recognized forms of privilege according to the studies of Case (2012), include White privilege, class privilege, Christian privilege, male privilege, and heterosexual privilege — however, to date, there has been little research on pretty privilege, and it's correlation to and in education. Pretty privilege individuals are recognized as attractive based on societal beauty standards; giving them an 'upper hand' in the world. The term itself recently grew in popularity on the social media app Tiktok, where women would post both their positive and negative experiences reflecting the definition. These occurrences ranged from 'sugar daddies' funding their education and living costs, receiving all-inclusive paid trips from global companies, having access to free items (e.g. clothing, makeup, etc) to post on social media because of having a following, obtaining free admission to social events based on appearance, and the ability to wiggle out of a speeding ticket when being pulled over by a male officer (Sharraine, 2021).

In agreement with Sharraine (2021), the study presented by Vemannagari & Spolia (2021) shows that an individual's appearance can have implications for the real world. More specifically, the research highlights that attractive people are more likely to receive interviews, employment opportunities, promotions and even higher wages (Vemannagari & Spolia, 2021). From an educational standpoint, having the quality of being recognized as a pretty student, can result in having more popularity in social circles, and even in on-campus clubs such as sororities; that tend to require good-looking features. This is similarly seen when it comes to athletes who meet these ideal standards of beauty and privilege, allowing them more access to more endorsements (Rovell, 2010), and to how political parties may win over more votes if they are attractive (Shahani-Denning, n.d.). As social media is developing in every sector, it is becoming more and more of a marketing strategy for brands. There are apps that have been released called beauty passes which essentially, if you are a model, social media influencer, or just a pretty girl, you can apply to get in to the exclusive app, and if you get in, you can obtain free access to restaurants, hair salons, medical cosmetics, makeup, clothing, yoga classes, you name it, for free. All you have to do is mention the company on social media.

In their article of *Beautiful and Lonely*, Huff (2021) discusses the halo effect, which is a form of cognitive bias that can occur as early as infancy, allowing us to form a general impression of someone based on one particular trait. In the 2000 study led by Slater, they suggest that the preference may be an evolutionary response: the prettier the face, the more it represents the stereotypical human (Slater et. al., 2000).

This particular study examined babies as young as just one day old. Those random babies, fresh from the womb and aged between one and seven days old, were shown pairs

of photographs featuring faces that adults had rated as attractive and less attractive. The researchers discovered that almost all of the babies spent more time staring at the photo of the attractive face than they did the less attractive one (Slater et. al., 2000, p. 266).

When we age, we continue to still believe that those who have an attractive face, are better than those who do not. An additional study performed on elementary school students found that:

Students perceived attractive teachers to be nicer and happier, based only on their photographs. Students also felt that they would learn more from the attractive teachers, preferring to have them as their teachers. As for the teachers who were perceived as less attractive, students naturally assumed they'd be more apt to punish them for misbehaving in class. It should be noted that this bias was equal between male and female students; they both had more positive perceptions of attractive teachers based on photographs alone (Hunsberger & Cavanagh, 1988, p. 70).

Likewise, the article, *In School, Good Looks Help and Good Looks Hurt*, Gordon & Crosnoe (2013) highlight how elementary school teachers have been recognized to have higher hopes for the more attractive students in their class. When students move through the education system and pursue university or college, their looks add the benefit of higher grade point averages and likelihood of a post-secondary education (Gordon & Crosnoe, 2013).

To further this information, a more recent study conducted in 2016 at the Metropolitan State University of Denver used outside observers to rate the physical attractiveness of thousands of female students (Markham, 2021). The researcher focused the standardized test scores of these females as a control, comparing the grades of the attractive students to those of the less attractive. It concluded that the former tended to perform much better in class and when the same

students took online courses, the ‘prettier’ students did not do as well (Markham, 2021). In sum, perceived physical attractiveness did in fact give female students an academic advantage, and online study levelled the playing field (Markham, 2021).

On the contrary, some of the negative connotations with the term included others having a preconceived opinion that a beautiful female is considered to be rude, incompetent, or mean. Recognized as discrimination by way of identity, the term pretty privilege is seen as a societal hierarchal pyramid, which ultimately disempowers women. Women begin to feel as though worth, success, and like-ability is now solely judged and determined by physical appearance, as it sits on the top of the pyramid (Bordo, 1993). A recent article written by Western University students emphasized:

Looks play an important role in how people are perceived by others — either for better or worse. It’s the first thing people use to make an opinion about you. It’s just human nature. So, if you don’t know somebody, you consciously or unconsciously judge them based on what they look like, (Vemannagari & Spolia, 2021, para. 5).

Yonce (2014) presents more preluding negative stigmas that are associated within its meaning: being pretty is not always a privilege. They concluded that friendships are becoming harder to attain and maintain: the notion of pretty privilege and the desire to fit the perfect beauty mould is leading women to only seek friendships with other women deemed pretty by societal beauty standards, in order to have access to all it seems to prevail (Yonce, 2014). Many people strive to be *that* girl but once they become her, they realize that being and maintaining miss perfection is a complete misconception (Brown, 2017).

Generalizations and Stereotypes

Many generalizations and stereotypes have been connected to the term pretty privilege. Women of such beauty standard can be viewed as intimidating or unfriendly, receive uncomfortable stares in public, and experience exclusion from friend groups based on these assumptions (Sharraine, 2021). Although none of these examples are exclusive to people who are deemed to be societally attractive, we are socialized to attach morality to looks (Brown, 2017). These elements may not be seen as character flaws when they are attributing to someone who meets the beauty standard, however, they can still negatively affect someone's livelihood. Even supposing that people are naturally drawn to attractive people, as demonstrated in the above readings, there are also people who instantly dislike all attractive people due to insecurity, and consciously go out of their way to belittle or shame them. Many of the negative reactions are typically from other females, correlating jealousy to one's physical appearance.

The two highly recognized and groundbreaking films to hit Hollywoods and contradict the ever-lasting stereotype of a 'dumb blonde' were the two Reese Witherspoon films, *Legally Blonde* and *Legally Blonde II*, released in the later 2000's. The film begins by addressing the stereotype immediately in the film when her relationship with her significant other fails, and she questions him saying, "so you're breaking up with me, because I'm too blonde?" Warren contends, "if I am going to run for an office in the senate by the time I'm thirty, I need someone who looks like Jackie, not Marilyn [Monroe]." The writer of the films offered a counteracting image to the negative stereotype of a 'dumb blonde' (Blackstone-Cail, 2007). The main character, Elle, intellectually grew from being a materialistic sorority girl, into an academically

accomplished law student. She became a Harvard graduate, and was offered an associate position at a prestigious law firm by the end of the film (Blackstone-Cail, 2007).

Licensed psychotherapist and educator Dovitch (2021) contended that, “throughout history, beauty has been a valued commodity, often an over-valued commodity — our modern society didn’t invent a reverence for attractiveness, it is simply carrying on a thousand-year-old tradition” (Huff, 2021, para. 37). There have been many attempts to challenge the generalizations and stereotypes attached to women who are of exquisite beauty, and who do not dress modestly. In fact, there was once a rule where a female could not meet a Queen while wearing a low cut gown, and Marilyn Monroe pushed boundaries by doing just that. The Queen glanced up and down at her low cut dress, and smiled.

Subsequently, in relationship to generic stereotypes being projected onto women based on appearance, Emily Ratajkowski, acclaimed model and actress, recently released their novel *My Body*. The text looks closely at the politics of their body through a unique and modern feminist perspective, exploring the fetishization of women’s beauty, the perverse dynamics of the fashion and film industries, and moreover, their personal proactive display of their body in an empowering way. Ratajkowski (2021) investigates the cultural commodification of women, addresses their experience in the education system pertaining to their body image representation, and how misogyny and objectification go hand in hand in these situations.

Most famously recognized for their role as a model-dancer in the song “Blurred Lines” by Robin Thicke, Ratajkowski became sexually objectified by the feminist community worldwide, claiming that they, along with their fellow models in the music video, were depicted as misogynistic (Ratajkowski, 2021). However, they claimed that if anything, their role in the video

was the complete opposite, stating to the press that, “I thought women would find my performance empowering” (Ratajkowski, 2021, p. 2). As headlines grew, many individuals became outraged by the viral music video, as a half-naked woman could not dare to be a feminist if they were representing their body image in that way. Ratajkowski (2021) expresses,

I felt confident in my body and my nakedness, and who was anyone to tell me that I wasn't empowered by dancing naked? In fact, wasn't it anti-women to try and tell me what to do with my body? Feminism is all about choice, so stop trying to control me. (Ratajkowski, 2021, p. 3).

They further this generalization of body shaming by reiterating their experience in middle school, contending that they had never experienced the same level of humiliation in the modelling industry that they had in the education system. Their teacher snapped their bra strap as a method of scolding them for letting it slip out from beneath their tank top. Ratajkowski (2021) argues,

To me, girls sexualizing themselves wasn't the issue, as feminists and anti-feminists would have us believe, but shaming them was. Why were we the ones being asked to adjust? To cover up and apologize for our bodies? I was tired of feeling guilty for the way I presented myself (Ratajkowski, 2021, p. 3).

Ratajkowski (2021) addresses another educational experience that occurred in their first year of art school, when they submitted a charcoal nude portrait to their professor. He suggested they draw a “woman with a waist so small, that she falls over and cannot stand up,” and advised them to, “play into the stereotypes of the beauty standard, or to show it's oppression”

(Ratajkowski, 2021, p. 4). In utter disbelief, Ratajkowski (2021) contends that to some degree,

all women are sexualized and objectified, but they were under the assumption that they could do it on their own terms, and had power in their ability to choose to do so. Ratajkowski (2021) highlights how they built a social media platform based on capitalizing their sexuality, but was objectified and limited by their position in the world as they became recognized solely as a sex symbol, and nothing more than just their body. Within the confines of a cis-hetero, capitalist, patriarchal world, Ratajkowski (2021) concludes that their beauty and talent were only valued through the satisfaction of the male gaze, which no longer fit their definition of empowerment.

Standards of Beauty

Body image: gender-specific sexual objectification and shaming.

“The emotional, sexual and psychological stereotyping of females begins when the doctor says, it’s a girl” — Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, (thinkexist.com).

In correlation to the generalizations and stereotypes connected with body image portrayal as Ratajkowski (2021) presented, Brown (2017) contends that as women grow into adults, they begin to realize that their body becomes an object. According to Potter (2012), the media can influence and shape the way people think about themselves. Gerbner (2002) argued that the effect of media might evolve over a great deal of time, with a potentially substantial impact, leading to their conceptualization of “cultivation theory.” They concluded that with persistency, a message that is constantly repeated will be more likely to be believe it reflects reality. Brown (2017) adds that when women are exposed to these types of images through the media, they believe it to be a baseline for what they need to look like, leading to ongoing mental health issues. Many women work at developing a socially perfect body based on beauty, grace, and femininity (Cronan & Scott, 2006).

Although widespread research into the portrayal of a woman's body image has expanded in terms of acceptance and empowerment, female students still required to have specific dress codes, opposed to males. A child's body is still sexualized. As discussed earlier, the act of the male gaze correlates with every-day life. Some theorists have noted that in advertising, "objectification and sexualized portrayals of the female body can be found even in situations where sex or representations of sex have nothing to do with the product being advertised" (Sampson, 2015, para. 8). Huff (2021) presented an article stating the following response in correlation to how women feel regarding body image and standards of beauty:

We have an innate need to be accepted and liked. One way to feel accepted is to look like everyone else. With the constant bombardment of images on what we think we should look like, our self-esteem can begin to erode if we feel we cannot obtain a particular look, especially if we already have a weaker sense of self. I think there is too much emphasis on looks — I see people not engaging with others because they feel ashamed of themselves, worried they will not fit in (Huff, 2021, para 41).

In 2020, the Journal of Vascular Surgery published a study titled *Prevalence of Unprofessional Social media Content Among Young Vascular Surgeons*. The research, led by three male authors, consisted of following 480 vascular surgeons from fake social media accounts to monitor their online activity (CBC Radio, 2020). The study focused on graduates between the years of 2016 and 2016, and found their online activity to be unprofessional conduct (CBC Radio, 2020). This included, but was not limited to the following: violating health legislation, breaking the law, appearing intoxicated, using drugs or making offensive or profane comments about patients and colleagues, holding or drinking alcohol, and commenting on

controversial topics and sporting (CBC Radio, 2020). When Dr. Yalda Safai responded to this study, they stated, “Let's not kid ourselves. When they were talking about pictures in swimwear and bikinis, they were clearly talking about women. They didn't have to spell it out. We all know they were talking about women. Nobody will ever criticize a male in his trunks on the beach in a photo.” (CBC Radio, 2020). They emphasized the question of how hobbies and professional work correlate: how does one become criticized for activities they partake in outside of their career? These factors do not relate to one’s intellectual ability, or capabilities in practice. Their movement, #MedBikini took to social media and grew worldwide. They contented, “I am a woman in medicine who loves to travel to tropical locations and dress accordingly. I will not wear my white coat and scrubs to Hawaii. This does not make me unprofessional or less intelligent or compassionate compared to my male colleagues. #medbikini” (CBC Radio, 2020, para. 13). Subsequently, the LGBTQ+ community additionally became involved, posting bikini images and statements contending, “Trans #MedBikini #gaymedtwitter. Because enjoying the water does not make me “unprofessional.” Because my identity is not “unprofessional.” Because #MedBikini is for ALL bodies” (CBC Radio, 2020, para. 13).

Safai argued that the problem was based on the decisions of the male co-authors, deeming what is and is not appropriate. They added, “if they had interviewed patients and heard directly from the mouths of patients that if they see their doctor in a bikini, it might have a negative impact on their decision to follow up with that doctor, that's another thing. But this was just their own opinion.” (CBC Radio, 2020, para. 22). In sum, the participants were not aware that they were part of a study, which violates the first principle of research: informed consent. The journal

issued a retraction and public apology for the study, as it failed to identify the errors in the design of the study with regards to conscious and unconscious bias (CBC Radio, 2020).

More recently, a graduate student at the University of Tennessee was expelled for sexual social media posts (Das, 2021). Kimberly Diei, a pharmacy graduate student, was anonymously reported for posting images deemed as crude and vulgar on their Twitter and Instagram pages, singing lyrics from the x-rated Cardi B song, “WAP” (McCloskey, 2021). Diei claimed, “UT spied on my social media activity — activity that has no bearing on my success as a pharmacist or my education. I can be a successful and professional pharmacist as well as a strong woman that embraces her sexuality. The two are not mutually exclusive” (Das, 2021, para. 6). They also state that “administrators appear to be making up the rules as they go, and imposing their personal tastes to make broad judgments about student behaviour” (Hartocollis, 2021, para. 20). Their lawyer, Greg H. Greubel, who is a staff attorney at the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, compares social media speech to the conversation, “it’s so hard to fit old First Amendment principles into the social media era. This is one of those areas of law that needs to evolve” (Hartocollis, 2021, para. 21).

The Professional Conduct Committee did not provide Diei with which university policies they violated, and gave them only two days to appeal the decision (McCloskey, 2021). Diei proceeded to move forward with a lawsuit to sue the university as they contended the university had imposed its social media policy in an unfair and inconsistent manner (McCloskey, 2021). In just under three weeks, the committee of the University of Tennessee reinstated Diei into the program (Das, 2021). Diei is set to receive her doctor of pharmacy degree in 2023. They

continue to post on social media, however, they state that they constantly ponders: “can I say this, or am I going to get into trouble for it? I truly don’t know.” (Hartocollis, 2021, para. 36).

Hartocollis (2021) deepens this study in their New York Times article by highlighting how social media platforms are struggling to police their content, and contends that universities are finding themselves in a similar position by being unable to represent realistic policies around civil speech and personal expression. The line between public and private communication is becoming fuzzy, at best, and the younger generations are claiming that there is no link between off-campus behaviour to school affiliation (Hartocollis, 2021). Peter Lake, director of the Center for Excellence in Higher Education Law and Policy at Stetson University College of Law, adds that these conflicts have “become more intense during the coronavirus pandemic, as the boundaries between work and home or campus and personal life have dissolved” (Hartocollis, 2021, para. 8). Moreover, they conclude, “if someone is shouting in a classroom, you have the right to control the time, place and manner. However, when they are shouting on Twitter, is it their space or yours?” (Hartocollis, 2021, para. 9). Subsequently, Mark Merritt, a former general counsel at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill adds:

Universities generally do not hunt through the social media of their students unless a member of their community, like a student or graduate, complains of threatening, inappropriate or harassing language in a post, or unless it puts the university in an inappropriate light. Universities don’t tend to be social media police in the sense that they’re out there actively monitoring social media. But it happens fairly frequently that things are brought to the attention of the administration (Hartocollis, 2021, para. 10).

Civil libertarians argue that students should have the ability to not worry about how they reflect on their school when no longer present on campus grounds (Hartocollis, 2021). Vera Eidelman, a lawyer with the speech, privacy and technology project of the American Civil Liberties Union, poses the question in relation: “Do they lose their ability to be anything other than a student at any point in their daily lives?” (Hartocollis, 2021, para. 19).

Summary

The collection of above literature reviewed has demonstrated several research findings that are related to issues of attractiveness privilege, generalizations and stereotypes, and the detrimental effects of sexual objectification of women; relevant to standards of beauty, popular culture, and body imagery. The upcoming chapter and literature covered will highlight my personal experiences with appearance and portrayal of body image, in relation to how it was defined as my identity in a classroom setting; and how the hobbies individuals partake in outside of their career, do not relate to one’s academic capabilities. By providing significant examples of image representation versus the standard and ethical practices of educators, I will place important emphasis on narrative inquiry to further my argument on how personal identity has nothing to do with professional or educational success.

Chapter Three: Application

As demonstrated in the above literature review, my argument has significant correlation to students in the education system; particularly, women. The previous chapter introduced two particular cases: Kimberly Diei (2021), who faced near-expulsion from the University of Tennessee, based on vulgar Twitter posts, and another study that derived from Yalda Safai's (2020) unprofessional conduct on her Instagram page. Additionally, the case of Ratajkowski (2021) examples the notion of being undermined intellectually based on how you portray your body. Each case demonstrates a thorough understanding of their experiences, personalities, and personal challenges. In contingency with my own personal experience of being removed from the Bachelor of Education program based on discrimination by way of identity, this chapter additionally presents my relevant learning journey, in relation to my experience with pretty privilege, issues of blondness, stereotypes, and sexual objectification in the education system.

Issues Of Blondness: Not Just Another Dumb Blonde

Like many caucasian babies, I was born with blonde hair. The first time I ever experienced the negative connotation with the hair colour was in my grade seven french class, when I pronounced a word incorrectly. The teacher would say, "what can you expect? she is a natural blonde!" to the class, who would all start laughing. I was also raised as an only child, which inclusively made my mother my best friend. I went home to tell her about what happened, and she told me not to worry about it, as people were simply just jealous of my golden locks. I quickly realized over time that the issue of being stereotyped as stupid would follow me around wherever I went.

The stigma entailed with a woman of blonde hair colour is that she is just a “dumb blonde,” containing little to no intelligence. This specific, hair-related stereotype can be dated back to 250 years ago, when the play, *Les Curiosités de la Foire*, established blondes as both sexually available and stupid. The lead role, Duthé, took long pauses before she talked, leaving people to assume she was quite literally, incompetent. Additionally, in 1953, the movie, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* hit the theatres with Marilyn Monroe as the main character, Lorelei, depicted as a dumb blonde. She was portrayed as absentminded and as someone who was only interested in marrying a rich man. Her most famous line, which only highlighted the stereotype even more, was: “I can be smart when it is important, but most men do not like it.” On the contrary, her brunette co-star, Dorothy, was depicted of intelligence and thorough capability.

Rooted in my personal experience, I learned that I had the ability to use this negative connotation to my advantage if I played it off in a joking mannerism. However, this was something that was projected on to me at a young age, something that I learned by way of discrimination. I began to believe it was okay, and socially accepted in society. By high school, when I pronounced, “quadrant one one one,” in a my grade nine math class, as opposed to the proper, “quadrant III (three),” I would simply say, “blame my hair colour,” and the teacher, along with my classmates, would laugh. I was always one to turn negative experiences into positives, and this continued throughout my educational journey, with professors in my undergraduate degree making statements such as, “at least you are pretty,” when I got an answer wrong. I would simply reply, “true,” and laugh it off, because I was too embarrassed to fight back. The issue with the ‘dumb blonde’ reference is not only that you are assumed to be incompetent, it is that you start believing it. When I was removed from the B.E.d. program, a part of my trauma was

overcoming the “maybe I was not smart enough after all,” argument that replayed constantly in the back of my mind.

Pretty Privilege in Education: My Personal Experience

Two examples of pretty privilege that I experienced during my educational journey consisted of false friendships based on social capital, and discrimination by way of identity; both of which ultimately concluded having my persona, moral, and academic strengths judged by my physical appearance. Beginning in my fourth year of my undergraduate degree, I landed myself in a relationship with a hockey player. That in accordance with a high social media following because of my ‘look’ and modelling career, I immediately noticed the growing demand of people wanting to be my friend. This poses a connection to social capital, which revolves around three dimensions: “interconnected networks of relationships between individuals and groups (social ties or social participation), levels of trust that characterize these ties, and resources or benefits that are both gained and transferred by virtue of social ties and social participation” (Poteyeva, 2018, para. 1). My so-called friends only wanted invites to the exclusive parties, to have pictures with me on their social media feeds in which they would ask me to re-share to my story in hopes they would become more popular, and receive all inclusive access to being around the players. However, that quickly disassembled once my relationship ended — my ‘friends’ simply stopped talking to me, as I was no longer a benefit to their social lives.

My second experience of pretty privilege during my academic career was being removed from the Bachelor of Education program for posting bikini photos on my Instagram handle. I knew prior to entering my teaching career that my looks could pose a problem, as people would often say things to me such as, “the young boys are going to be drooling all over you!” It was the

same remarks I would get in high school, as a swimming lesson instructor, when fathers would specifically ask if “the pretty blonde lifeguard” would be teaching their sons, so they would have something more than just the water to ‘look at.’ These types of statements reflect the negative stigma that is attached to assumptions based on appearance. The theory on the commodification of bodies represents that sexual objectification is just one symptom in this reduction in the value of the female person (Akinradewo, 2019).

Even though I was always dressed modestly during my practicum experience while being a teacher-student, I was still removed from the B.E.d program based on the assumption that my images on social media were promiscuous, for wearing a bikini. The male principal evidently displayed discriminatory, preconceived ideals based on stereotypes of women. The way he was looking at me the day he chose to remove me from the program, was the complete opposite of how he looked at me the previous three weeks; judgementally, through what is commonly called the male gaze.

The male gaze can be best described in Mulvey’s feminist theory, as the “act of depicting women from a masculine, heterosexual perspective that presents and represents women as sexual objects” (Sampson, 2015, para. 5). As I sat in his office on that ‘casual Friday,’ limitless tears ran down my cheeks. All he had to say when I attempted to defend myself was, “I can tell you wear your heart on your sleeve,” sarcastically; as if my reaction to the situation that just blindsided me was a sign of weakness. The literature of Fischer (2018) supports this assumption, in the theory of the emotional sensitivity hypothesis; which concludes that a typical generalization made on women is that “women are more sensitive to subtle cues, implying that they perceive the intended emotion as more intense” (Fischer et. al., 2018).

Through all the tears, my biggest turning point was when a member of my own family told me that I was “too pretty to be a teacher anyways” — and that I would not need an education, because I was pretty enough to marry for money. This is connected to the claim I make earlier in this paper, as it is placing emphasis on the stigmatism that women of blonde hair are only interested in marrying rich men, as Marilyn Monroe’s character was first portrayed in the 1953 film, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. I knew this was not the future I wanted, considering how hard I had worked in everything I ever did, to avoid this depiction in later life. I have been on dates where I was simply referred to as ‘eye-candy,’ or just there to make the person standing beside me look better. I have received every job I ever applied for, and have been told by peers that the only reason I got the job is because of my face, rather than academic strength. That might be true for modelling, but their references were referring to my positions at the pool, school, public gym and as a front desk agent at a hotel. When working at an airport for a brief two weeks, the manager told me she hired me to have a pretty face that was always smiling around, so the pilots would be in better moods when they landed. I quit the next day, as I recognized my intellectual worth and abilities were being undermined.

In accordance with the literature review, my personal experiences share the same negative familiarity of attractiveness privilege that Yonce (2014) and Brown (2017) discussed. The challenges, attitudes, and experiences of others, such as Sharraine (2021), merely mirror those of my own. It is therefore evident that I, along with many other women, experience the negative associations of pretty-privilege on a daily basis. This discrimination by way of identity ultimately defines our identity in a classroom setting, allowing no room for professional or

educational success. This is interconnected with my next analysis presenting the barriers of stereotypes and sexual objectification that women experience in the education system.

Stereotypes and Sexual Objectification In Education

My responsibility as a teacher student was to learn, grow, and help students foster lifelong learning. However, that was not what I experienced in my practicum facilities. I was deemed to have not fit the ideal teacher identity, and received no support from my own institution in defending my case. In relationship to Dr. Safai's experience of participating in beauty pageants during MED school and receiving negative backlash, I too received the same type of criticism while being apart of the B.E.d program amidst being a model (CBC Radio, 2020). My appearance, paired with my portrayal of body image online completely dismantled my reputation as an educator and my teacher identity; similar to how Ratajkowski (2021) was sexually objectified in her classroom and career, for how she chooses to represent her body image.

The guilt, shame, and unfairness I felt afterwards was nearly unbearable; how could my confidence, outweigh my competence? Over time, specifically my time spent this past year in the MEd program at TRU, I slowly learned that it was not my problem — I should not have to change the way I present myself in a career on social media that is funding my education; as it did not affect how I treated students, faculty, or colleagues. I should not have been 'looked up' in the first place, to the point where an education system did enough digging to find my non-legal surname, when I did not do anything wrong. The only thing wrong with this situation, was having my ability as a student undermined, based on physical appearance and body portrayal.

In recent years, there has been the growing social media hashtags consisting of women empowerment: #girlboss, #bossbabes, and #girlssupportinggirls. However, what happens to the individuals who do not fit the ideal beauty standard? Since her recent weight gain, TikTokker Chloe Xandria (2021) claimed that she did not get to experience this privilege, contending that, “nothing I say holds weight, if I look ugly.” (Xandria, 2021) Some of the examples she listed included were people no longer holding doors for her, people no longer complimenting her outfits or hair in public, no longer receiving the expressions of genuine human kindness, people no longer smiling at her, and doctors no longer taking the time to figure out what is wrong with her during medical appointments. She stated, “pretty privilege and skinny privilege is real” in her caption (Xandria, 2021).

Recently, the term sizeism is a new implication that contributes to female body image. Sizeism, also recognized as size discrimination, is the idea that people are prejudged based on their size. This privilege of body size has led to more cases of body shaming and dysmorphia coming forward (Yuko, 2018). For example, as a petite and rather thin model, I am always assumed to be healthy. My weight is not the first thing someone notices about me, unless I am being thin-shamed. Sizeism intersects with other identity domains, such as race, gender, class, sexual attraction, ethnic, and dis/ability (Yuko, 2018). The social construction of sizeism privilege intertwines with closely with pretty-privilege.

One alternative explanation that has been advanced is the question of if pretty privilege is another term for white privilege (McIntosh, 2019). Does it merely reflect the simple, western standard of beauty of skinny: fair-skinned women? It could indeed be portrayed as such, because as it seems, the closer you are to fitting the Western standard of beauty, the closer you are to

being white. People of colour can still have pretty privilege, because they can have thin privilege, which is again, closer to the proximity of western standard of beauty (McIntosh, 2019).

However, it is the tools of oppression that are making them privileged, such as having mixed or light skin privilege — which in sum, are features of Eurocentric beauty. “There is always a preference towards ... tiny short blonde girls. They get so much attention when they walk around or at the club. This race preference is terrible [and] not okay,” explains Assadzadeh (Vemannagari & Spolia, 2021, para. 23).

Individuals eventually begin to see the negative implications associated with the elements of pretty privilege and body image, coming to the realization that being the ‘it’ girl, isn’t ‘it’ anymore — it is not a privilege to be seen only for your appearance. Recently, I was at an appointment for a content creator collaboration. After sharing many laughs with the aesthetician, she said to me, “I honestly thought you were going to be stuck up or something, because you are so blonde and pretty.” I looked at her and simply said, “I get that a lot. It is difficult to meet and form genuine conversations and relationships with people because they have a preconceived opinion on me based off my appearance on social media.” It is one thing to be judged in the modelling industry based on your physical identity, however, it becomes a whole new story when peers, colleagues, family members, and faculty in the education system make you out to be someone you are not, solely based on your appearance.

Reflecting back on my situation, I was removed under bias from a practicum school principal, and my own institutions dean and program coordinator. This is interconnected with the argument I make in this paper of generalizations being made based upon discrimination by way of identity: the removal was based on the premise of what I looked like online, rather than who I

was in a classroom as a student-teacher. To illustrate this more explicitly, there were no issues with my academics — quite frankly, I was receiving level 3's and 4's on all of my associate teacher's feedback (based on the Ontario rubric scale, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest). There were no comments or remarks made from students, staff, or parents, regarding my social media images, considering my name in the modelling industry differed from my legal name. In fact, I was quite liked by students, staff, and parents; notably recognized for the funny and relatable stories I shared. Moreover, I connected with each and every student in a different way — a character trait that not all student-teachers have the ability to do. The choice of removing a student based on images posted on social media pertaining to one's alternate career, leisure activities, and photos from travelling during free time, is the definition of discrimination by way of identity. An opinion was formed of me, solely based off image representation and physical appearance, rather than my intellectual ability and teacher identity.

Instead of seeing this occurrence as a failure, I took it as a push in the right direction: to pursue the Masters of Education program at Thompson Rivers University online, remaining almost anonymous. This experience provided me with insight and clarity: not only was I smart enough to maintain a 4.20 GPA as a graduate student, but my looks did not hold value for or against my favour. I never shared an image of myself, and I believe that because my physical identity was concealed over the past year and a half, it removed the option for professors and colleagues to form an opinion on me based on my physical appearance, ultimately allowing me to demonstrate that my capabilities as a professional student had no correlation or bias to my blonde hair colour, or portrayal of body image.

Summary

The constant belittlement and discrimination by way of identity I was exposed to throughout my educational and personal life journey were enough for me to pose into question: how is discrimination by way of hair colour and appearance any different from that of skin colour? There no supporting evidence to show that women who are blonde have less intelligence than their non-blond counterparts (Blackstone-Cail, 2007). Whether the remark is made consciously or unconsciously, by men or women, as or joke or out of insecurity, it is merely an aim to silence women. In order to remove stereotypes, educators can begin by exploring the histories of stereotypes with their students to identify the role of power dynamics, consider how they are used, and acknowledge a responsibility for confronting stereotypes. Subsequently, by recognizing prejudice on the grounds of a person's appearance, accepting how appearance-based discrimination is not permissible, Hypnotherapist Andrew Pearson (2021) contends that "if this social conditioning can be learned, then it follows that it can be unlearned" (Mohammed, 2021, para. 17). In order to thoroughly shift the existing perspective on sexual objectification, a modern, feminist approach is suggested to be implemented into educational institutions. By removing the source of where objectification commences, such as dress codes for female students, it removes the barrier of grooming girls to believe that they are at fault for not covering up their skin. By detaching this primary obstacle, it will separate the negative stigma attached to woman being deemed as promiscuous or sexual for dressing how they want. Lastly, education should place emphasis on learning about feminism, choice, the male gaze, and validity. The following concluding chapter will deliver my findings, implications, future research, and closing thoughts.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

This chapter provides a summary of research findings on pretty privilege, generalizations and stereotypes pertaining to issues of blondness, and standards of beauty including body image, gender-specific sexual objectification and shaming. Through the analysis of my personal learning journey in correlation to the comparisons I uncovered with other students' experiences in the education system that surfaced, I additionally found more commonalities as the study began to unfold.

Each of the preceding chapters highlight the issues surrounding discrimination by way of identity. In chapter one, I introduced the topics of pretty-privilege and sexual objectification, both of which held significant importance to me as they considerably impacted my educational career. I argued that there is a link between pretty privilege and preconceived expectations of a student's ability based on physical appearance. I claimed that teacher identity needs to be redefined to fit a more modern and feminist approach to women and body acceptance, because a woman's body representation is her own choice, and has no relevancy to professional or educational success.

I introduced my theoretical framework of intersectionality through a feminist lens, to support the existing literature of attractiveness privilege as presented by Yonce (2014), to more thoroughly analyze the connection between gender and pretty privilege. This proceeded to assist in my critical examination of the literature around standards of beauty, in relation to discrimination by way of identity caused by generalizations and stereotypes; and its effects on the sexual objectification of women.

In chapter two, I incorporated the existing literature surrounding pretty privilege and its relationship to discrimination by way of identity. Within my review of literature, I included works offering explanations of attractiveness privilege (Yonce, 2014), a comprehensive focus on generalizations and stereotypes surrounding women who have blonde hair (Blackstone-Cail, 2007), and analyses of standards of beauty; relevant to popular culture, body imagery, and the sexual objectification of women (Ratajkowski, 2021). The literature review substantially demonstrated a connection between a woman's physical appearance, and how it can undermine her academic success (Sampson, 2015). It concluded that female students are experiencing pretty privilege, sexual objectification, and body shaming in education; posing a barrier to their academics.

In chapter three, I provided an application in which depicted the connection between my argument and literature review, ultimately linking context with reason and theory. This was applied through cases such as my own, Safai (2020), and Diei (2021), which each provided real-world examples that convey the current barriers in which women in the education system encounter. Lastly, I provided effective and realistic ways to shift this discrimination by way of identity; placing emphasis on how society must first acknowledge that it exists, then implement a feminist-based education system where woman no longer feel discriminated against for how they choose to present themselves.

In chapter four, I presented my conclusion, summarizing the chapters and findings, hereby continued with implications, future research, and closing thoughts.

Implications

The influence of the education system provides lasting effects on students, one of which is holding the role and responsibility of accepting students for who and what they choose to be. The notion of a 'pretty' woman not being fit to be an educator, or part of an educational institution, holds no weight in today's society. Woman with recognizable beauty can still reach high levels of education and success; despite their physical identity and portrayal of self image.

In scholarly conversation, the theoretical implications demonstrate an ongoing discrimination against women in regards to gender sexualization and objectification; which is correlated to body imagery and portrayal. Additionally, there is an identified gap in the literature pertaining to students' physical attractiveness and relationship to educational privilege. Moreover, the practical world demonstrates that discrimination by way of identity exists both inside and outside of the classroom. In order to promote a healthy learning environment that is equal and fair to all students through a local and global perspective, program administrators and educational institution faculty members should seek to re-define what the standards and ethical practices of teachers, students, and teacher-students are to assist in removing this barrier against females.

Future Research

This study is primarily limited due to the lack of previous research. Although my personal learning journey interconnects with those of other students, there could have been more students with different backgrounds that may have had varied experiences. Additionally, I chose to focus a portion of my research specified to only blonde females, pretty-privileged individuals, and others who have experienced an educational experience similar to mine. The intent was

never to make a generalization on my part as the researcher, nor to generalize any interpretations of the imagery of a “dumb blonde.” Rather, my goal was to describe my personal learning journey, while comparing and contrasting it with other narratives of woman who have faced these specific experiences of discrimination; to in turn demonstrate that there is no correlation to intellect and character, based on one’s physical appearance.

Closing Thoughts

As I conclude this contemplation of my academic experience, I am convinced that the rules and regulations in regards to image depiction pertaining to females in the education system need to be reflected on, openly acknowledged, and adjusted accordingly to meet a modern day approach. Through the voices of the women who shared similar experiences of discrimination, their stories have mirrored my own. My original aim in this capstone paper was to raise awareness to these forms of discrimination by way of identity, but I have come to realize my own self-reflections in the process. I propose future educators to keep this conversation open, and to maintain engaging in this particular area of discrimination by way of identity. In order to promote a healthy learning environment that is equal and fair to all students, program administrators and educational institution faculty members should seek to re-define what the standards and ethical practices of teachers, students, and teacher-students are.

Because of my two professors, Wayne, from my undergraduate degree, and Linda from my Bachelor of Education program, who believed in me and wrote letters of recommendation to Thompson Rivers just last summer despite knowing my situation; in accordance with my parents and Aunt Cindy who didn’t give up on me by supporting me in pursuing graduate school, and a previous educational institution who thought I didn’t fit the proper mould of a teacher identity, I

am able to sit here and confidently write this conclusion with happy tears rolling down my smiling cheeks, and be proud of how far I have come, and have faith in how far I will go. I am Chelsie Longstreet, and I identify as a professional educator, who possesses the necessary qualifications, education, and skillset to be a teacher. I am also Chelsie G, and I identify as a successful fashion model and content creator, recognized globally for my talent in the industry. I am more than just my body, and more than a dumb blonde. The way I choose to represent myself in any setting, is my choice to make — not yours. If a photo in a bikini is too inappropriate for your eyes to see, I suggest you re-evaluate your own identity and perceptions towards the female body. This problem is no longer an iss-me [*my issue*], it is an iss-**you** [*your issue*].

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