

## Capturing Beauty Bias: Validation And Application Of The Pretty Privilege Scale (PPS)

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Amna Hassan, <sup>2</sup>Afia Azeem, <sup>3</sup>Sadia Shaukat, <sup>4</sup>Tanzeela Rahman, <sup>5</sup>Sajid Bashir Shah, <sup>6</sup>Sehrish Mir & <sup>7</sup>Sajid-Ur-Rehman

### Abstract

*The study aimed to develop and evaluate psychometric properties of a comprehensive instrument for assessing prejudices against beauty prevalent in Pakistani society. In the initial phase, a pool of 59 items was generated through literature review, focus groups, and interviews, with an acceptable value of content validity index (CVI), based on expert ratings. The face validity of the preliminary scale was assessed through a pilot study involving 400 participants, through exploratory factor analysis. Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted to examine the internal consistency and dimensionality of the scale, revealing three main variables: media influence, interpersonal dynamics, and workplace environments. In the second phase, Confirmatory Factor Analysis was performed with 200 participants to validate the factor structure of the scale, and its psychometric properties, including alpha reliability coefficient ( $\alpha$ ), were determined. Ultimately, the study resulted in the development of psychometrically sound Pretty Privilege Scale (PPS), which measures three primary categories of beauty-related privileges.*

**Keywords:** Beauty, Privilege, Pretty, Exploratory Factor Analysis, Confirmatory Factor Analysis, Media Influence, Interpersonal Dynamics, Workplace environment

### Introduction

When an individual has an attraction to the aspect of appearance, he will be treated by others in a special way. On the other hand, individuals with physical appearances that are considered less attractive will be treated normally to the point of being less sympathetic (Hurlocks, 1999). The idea of "pretty privilege" holds that those who meet the prevailing beauty standards in their community are accorded greater advantages and opportunities than those who do not. These advantages include increased attention, friendliness, and praise from strangers as well as increased opportunities for success in relationships, work, education, and health. This perception leads individuals to believe that individuals who possess physical attractiveness are more likely to receive attention and employment opportunities. This phenomenon is commonly known as beauty privilege, while in scientific discourse, it is referred to as physical attractiveness (Dion, Berscheid & Walster, 1972). Pretty privilege is based on the physical attractiveness stereotype, which is the tendency to associate positive traits and outcomes with people who are perceived as physically appealing, and negative ones with those who are not.

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<sup>1</sup>Lecturer, Department of Psychology, International Islamic University, Islamabad (IIUI)

<sup>2,3,4,5,6</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Wah, Wah Cantt (UoW)

<sup>7</sup>Department of Psychology, Abbottabad University of Science & Technology (AUST)

Corresponding Author

Dr. Amna Hassan

Lecturer International Islamic University, Islamabad

Social workers acknowledge the individual, community, and society level factors that contribute to hardship and oppression. Social workers also acknowledge that if certain groups of people are oppressed, those who do not belong to those oppressed groups experience privilege (McIntosh, 2012). Commonly recognized types of privilege include White privilege, male privilege, Christian privilege, heterosexual privilege, and class privilege (Case, Iuzzini, & Hopkins, 2012; McIntosh, 2012). These privileges are commonly acknowledged as White privilege, male privilege, Muslim privilege, heterosexual privilege, and class privilege in literature (Case, Iuzzini, & Hopkins, 2012; McIntosh, 2012).

This study aims to understand physical attractiveness by investigating the undeserved benefits that those who are deemed physically handsome, have in society. Furthermore, this research would employ the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and conflict theory to elucidate how and why these benefits transpire. To consider physical appearance as a privileged quality, attractiveness privilege would be analyzed through two distinct theoretical lenses. Firstly, through intersectionality, it would be explored that how various forms of privilege—such as race, gender, social class, age, and disability status—intersect with attractiveness privilege. Intersectionality suggests that various forms of privilege and oppression are interconnected rather than existing independently. This concept acknowledges that different aspects of identity, such as race, gender, social class, age, or ability, intersect to shape individuals' experiences of advantage and disadvantage. Instead of isolating these factors, intersectionality emphasizes how they overlap and interact to create unique situations of privilege and oppression for each person. This perspective serves as a valuable framework for examining how physical attractiveness might impact individuals differently across different social contexts (Collins, 2012; Garry, 2011; Hulko, 2009; McIntosh, 2012; MacKinnon, 2013; Miller & Garran, 6 2008). This entails investigating how these different dimensions of privilege either shape our perceptions of attractiveness or influence the advantages conferred by attractiveness based on an individual's position within these categories. Secondly, utilizing conflict theory, how inequality persists as those in positions of power create and maintain systems that perpetuate their privileged status in society would be explored (Resnick & Wolff, 2013; Rummel, 1977). Researchers have indicted exposure to media as a factor associated with maladaptive attitudes and behaviors associated with body image and evaluation (e.g., Myers & Biocca, 1992; Tiggeman, 2003; Richins, 1991). Media plays an important role in shaping our perception of attractiveness privilege by presenting certain beauty standards. Through various forms of media such as advertisements, movies, dramas we are bombarded with unrealistic beauty standards which effects our own perception of beauty. These portrayals can lead to feelings of inadequacy and can emerge issues such as low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction etc.

Pretty privilege is not, however, a straightforward or universal phenomena. Numerous elements, including individual characteristics, situational settings, cultural norms, and personal preferences, have an impact on it. Furthermore, it can affect the recipients and those who judge someone's attractiveness in both positive and bad ways. For example, although handsome people may benefit socially and financially, they may also encounter difficulties including prejudice, resentment, jealousy, and inflated expectations. Similarly, while unattractive people may suffer from social and economic disadvantages, they may also benefit from lower expectations, greater empathy, or self-improvement motivation. Pretty privilege is a controversial and complex topic that has been explored by various researchers and scholars from different disciplines and perspectives. Some of the questions that have been raised and debated include: How is attractiveness defined and measured? How does pretty privilege vary across cultures, genders, ages, and other groups? How does pretty privilege affect self-esteem, mental health, and well-being? How can we challenge and reduce the bias and discrimination based on appearance? How can we promote a more inclusive and diverse view of beauty? Pretty privilege operates on the premise that individuals who align with societal beauty standards

enjoy significant advantages and opportunities not available to others. It refers to the benefits received by those who meet cultural norms of attractiveness. Lookism, also known as appearance bias, is described as prejudice or discrimination based on a person's appearance, as outlined in a 2009 report in the *Journal of Industrial Relations*. Those with pretty privilege are believed to receive preferential treatment, whether consciously or unconsciously, due to their physical attractiveness. This preferential treatment may manifest in job opportunities, discounts or upgrades in commercial settings, or generally more favorable treatment from strangers. There is empirical evidence supporting the existence of pretty privilege, reinforcing the validity of this theory. In the initial phase of a trust game, individuals who are deemed attractive tend to be seen as more trustworthy and receive higher earnings compared to those who are perceived as unattractive (Wilson & Eckel, 2006).

Numerous research findings indicate that individuals perceived as more attractive (based on societal norms) are often preferred in job hiring processes, offered assistance more readily, and viewed in a positive light, regardless of merit. "One influential work that contributed to the popularization of the concept is Peggy McIntosh's essay "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," published in 1989. McIntosh's essay focused primarily on white privilege but touched upon the privileges associated with physical appearance as well. A Psychologist Explains Why Life is Easier For Attractive People". This article explores how societal beauty standards impact people's lives and the advantages that conventionally attractive individuals may experience. It delves into the science behind pretty privilege and the connection between aesthetic beauty and moral judgments. An article discusses the real-world implications of pretty privilege, including its impact on self-esteem and workplace dynamics. It emphasizes the need for building confidence and body positivity to counteract the effects of this bias. Another article highlights the paradox of pretty privilege, where attractive individuals may feel entitled to their advantages. It also explores how pretty privilege can be used for good when handled appropriately. Research shows that attractive women may experience cognitive dissonance when benefiting from pretty privilege. They may simultaneously face contempt and hostility due to societal expectations. Since then, numerous scholars, activists, and writers have examined the influence of attractiveness and beauty standards on social advantages and inequalities. Their contributions have contributed to a broader understanding of the concept of pretty privilege and its implications in various aspects of life. One key concept is that a privilege or oppression in one domain can influence the extent or nature of privilege or oppression experienced in another domain (Collins, 2012; Garry, 2011; Hulko, 2009; McIntosh, 2012; MacKinnon, 2013; Miller & Garran, 2008).

### **Rationale of the Study**

The goal of the current study is to create a native psychometric instrument to gauge the privilege of beauty that exists in Pakistani society. The Beauty Privilege Scale was created because we have observed that a person's appearance greatly influences how society views them. The objective of this research is to evaluate, using quantitative methods, the degree to which people who are seen attractive might be granted advantages in different areas. We want to create the Beauty Privilege Scale because we want to take a close look at and understand how being considered attractive can either help or hurt people. Previous research in different areas has suggested that looking good can affect how well someone does in their personal and work life. That's why we need a tool that can measure and tell us more about these effects. In the development of Beauty Privilege Scale, a thorough review of relevant literature, expert consultations, and empirical testing was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the scale. The things we find out from this study could really help in talking about how society treats people based on how they look. The Beauty Privilege Scale uses statistical analysis to shed light on the effects that a particular appearance has on individuals in various contexts. The data we obtain may be utilized to improve laws and regulations, raise public awareness of these

problems, and promote further investigation into the relationship between privileges and being viewed as attractive. Overall, by highlighting the significance of beauty privilege—the idea that physical attractiveness may either benefit or harm a person—we hope this study contributes to a more equitable and inclusive society.

### **Objectives**

- To develop an indigenous scale to measure beauty privilege scale for the population of Pakistan.
- To establish psychometric properties and validate the pretty privilege scale (PPS)

### **Method**

The current research comprised of two distinct phases.

#### **Phase I:**

##### **Development of Pretty Privilege Scale (PPS)**

The process of identifying the construct and delving into the phenomenology of pretty privilege included reviewing existing literature, discerning themes from responses of FGD's participants, and semi-structured interviews.

##### **Items generation.**

In order to generate the items, following steps were conducted to ensure the conceptual basis of the main phenomenon.

##### **Reviewing the Relevant Literature.**

The initial phase in conceptualizing the phenomenology of pretty privilege involved an exhaustive literature review. Thorough examination of attractiveness literature was undertaken, assessing the existing progress in understanding beauty privilege. Various theories explaining attractiveness were scrutinized, exploring psychologists' and theorists' perspectives. This initial groundwork aimed to comprehend the explanations for attractiveness and laid the foundation for developing the phenomenology of beauty privilege. The review identified privileges associated with attractiveness in social settings, the education system, relationships, and other societal domains.

##### **Conduction of Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to conceptualize the construct. These were conducted with three PhD experts in Psychology, each having a decade of experience. Using convenience sampling, experts from various regions of Pakistan were selected, with proper permission and consent obtained for audio-recording. The interviews focused on gathering expert opinions on beauty privilege in the context of Pakistani culture and religion. The transcribed interviews were meticulously analyzed, identifying comprehensive themes related to beauty privilege.

##### **Focus Group Discussion**

To reinforce the idea of beauty privilege, FGDs involving a diverse adult population of Pakistan were conducted. Convenience sampling was used to select participants, ensuring consent and confidentiality. Each session lasted 40-60 minutes, with a total of five focus groups (N = 25). The first group included working and non-working women (n = 5, age 25-56), the second comprised men from various professions (n = 5, age 25-60), and the third had both men and women (n = 5, age 29-62). The fourth and fifth groups included university students and faculty (n = 10). Participants shared their experiences of beauty privileges, recorded and transcribed

for analysis. Themes derived from FGDs and interviews, were integrated with literature-reviewed themes (appearance-based discrimination, societal beauty standards, Intersectionality) to create a comprehensive item pool of 78 statements for scale construction. This pool resulted from meticulous observation, comprehensive analysis, and thorough assessment of previous literature, FGDs and semi-structured interviews.

#### **Item- Content Validity Index (I-CVI).**

In order to validate the scale, Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated in terms of each item's relevancy and clarity to the actual construct (Haynes, Richard, & Kubany, 1995). All items were analyzed by six subject matter experts (Lynn, 1986). They were requested to rate each statement according to clarity of statements, relevancy to the construct and comprehensibility of the items. Fifty nine items were retained however, seven items were discarded on the basis of CVI value less than .78 (Lynn, 1986). Value of the content validity index for the whole scale was .84 that shows the scale is valid (Lynn, 1986; Wynd, Schmidt, & Schaefer, 2003).

#### **Pilot study.**

For establishing the construct validity of the developing scale, preliminary testing was conducted, by using cross sectional research design.

#### **Establishing construct validity through factor analysis.**

Exploratory Factor Analysis was run to ensure the construct validity so that the dimensionality and internal factor structure would be explored.

#### **Sample.**

The sample was comprised of 400 males and females, age ranged from 18-40 years, with no reported physical and psychological disorders, was approached through convenient sampling. The developing scale was consisted of 59, four point likert-type items. The respondents were asked to respond each statement on a scale from 1 to 4 where, 1 shows strongly agree and 4 as strongly disagree. All items were retained as no ambiguity was found in the comprehension of the items.

#### **Procedure.**

The participants were requested to fill the developing scale according to their opinion and belief about the construct. Instructions were given clearly and informed consent was taken. Confidentiality was assured. Data was collected individually from participants. It was then analyzed using SPSS-23 version.

#### **Results.**

EFA was carried out to examine the factor structure of 59 items. Principal component analysis with varimax rotation was used to examine the dimensionality of the developing scale. Some of the items facing multi collinearity issue and some having problem in loading on the factors up to sufficient value i.e. .30 so these were discarded. Some items were loading very low on all factors. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .85 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant  $\chi^2(143) = 1438.8, p < .001$  which specify that the correlations between items were sufficiently large for running principal component analysis. After satisfying with all indicators, fifteen items were retained for the final version.

#### **The Pretty Privilege Scale (PPS; Final Version)**

The final scale comprised of 15 items and it has three factors with five items measuring each factor. Factors were determined through the scree plot (Figure 1).

Sr.No	F1	F2	F3
1	0.742		
2	0.703		
3	0.565		
4	0.5		
5	0.438		
6		0.648	
7		0.599	
8		0.597	
9		0.565	
10		0.551	
11			0.653
12			0.569
13			0.487
14			0.472
15			0.436

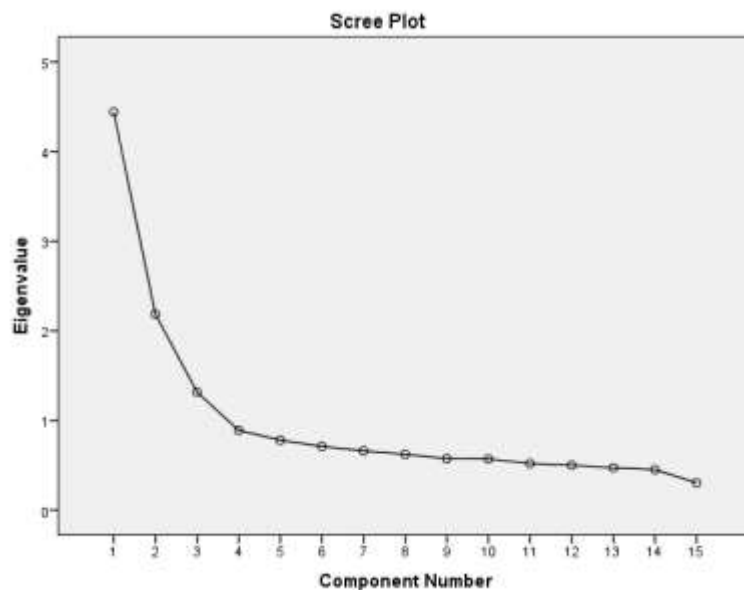


Figure 1. Scree Plot for the Newly Developed Pretty Privilege scale (PPS)

Scree plot of the newly developed scale describes clearly the three factors with Eigen value greater than one, hence suggest that three factors need to be retained in the final version.

**Table 1** Factor loadings of items along 3 factors of PPS (N=400)

Note. Rotation converged in 5 iterations

The items were selected based upon acceptable factor loadings (see Table 1). The description of each factor explained in Table 1 is as follows.

**Factor 1: Media Industry.** The first factor is a unique characteristic of this scale and is not measured as a separate factor in scale to measure pretty privilege in media industry setting. It was labeled as Media Industry. It has all the items that measure the existence of pretty privilege in media related settings (e.g., Physical appearance can influence an artist's success on social media platforms; Attractive individuals may have more opportunities for brand partnerships). It includes 5 items (1 to 5).

**Factor 2: Social Interaction.** Total 5 items (6 to 10) emerged to have high loadings in this factor. It has all the items measuring Pretty privilege in social settings (e.g., Attractive people may be more readily forgiven for mistakes; Attractive people are perceived more trustworthy and loyal).

**Factor 3: Work Settings.** Five items (11 to 15) had high factor loadings in this factor that measures the prevalence of pretty privilege in work settings. It includes measuring the pretty privilege when perceiving one's competency, selection for promotion and leadership opportunities (e.g., Attractiveness can impact how colleagues perceive one's competence; Attractive individuals are likely to be selected for promotions).

**Phase II: Establishing Psychometric Properties of Pretty Privilege Scale**

To ensure the psychometric properties of the newly developed scale of PPS, these two steps were followed;

- Confirmatory Factor Analysis.
- Convergent and Discriminant Validity.

**Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).**

To confirm the dimensionality and factor structure of newly developed scale of PPS' measurement model, CFA was run by using AMOS 22, after the application of EFA.

**Sample.**

Literate, male and female sample (n=200) with no diagnosed psychological and physical disease, age ranged from 18 years to 40 years was approached through convenient sampling by using cross-sectional research design.

**Results.**

Three factor structure of PPS was assessed to describe the model fit indices of the measurement model.

**Table 2** Modification indices of the Newly Developed Scale PPS (N=200)

Fit Indices	$\chi^2$	df	CMIN/df	RMSEA	IFI	CFI	TLI
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PPS	129.27	85	1.51	.05	.95	.94	.93
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**Note.** PPS= Pretty Privilege Scale; CMIN/DF = Minimum Discrepancy/ Degree of Freedom; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; IFI = Increment Fit Index; NFI= Normed Fit Index; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; \*p=RMSEA = 0.05 to 0.08, \*p= CMIN<3.0

Modification indices indicate the best fit for the measurement model with 3 factors as all of these indices within the acceptable range i.e. CMIN/df < 3, CFI >.90, TLI >.90, IFI >.90, and RMSEA < 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

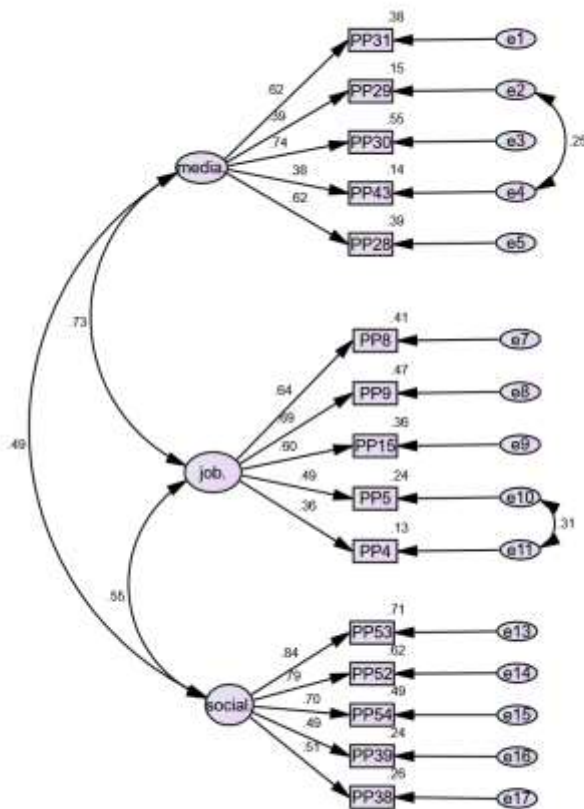


Figure 2. Measurement model of PPS

Figure 2 indicates the factor loadings of items along with regression weights of covariances achieved through confirmatory factor analysis. Final model attained through CFA was consisted of 15 items belonging from 3 factors, reflecting the good fitness of the model.



**TABLE 3**  
Inter-scale Correlations of 3 Subscales of Pretty Privilege Scale (N=200)

S. No	Variables	1	2	3	4
1	PPS	-	.64**	.69**	.74**
2	MI		-	.22**	.37**
3	SI			-	.46**
4	WS				-

Note PPS= Pretty Privilege, MI=Media Industry, SI=Social Interaction, WS= Work Setting  
\*\*p>0.01

The result in Table 3 reveal that there is a strong positive correlation between PPS and its subscales. The total score of pretty privilege has significant correlation with all of its subscales. The reason for high correlation is that all subscales measure the existence of phenomenon in different settings. However, the inter correlations among the subscales is between .22 and .74 at  $p < .00$ . The correlation matrix demonstrates its internal consistency (Nunnally, 1994).

**Table 4** Alpha Reliabilities, Means, and Standard Deviations on PPS and Its Subscales (N = 200)

Variables	K	$\alpha$	M	S.D	Range	
					Actual	Potential
PPS	15	.81	173.2	20.8	58-231	59-236
MI	5	.74	15.8	2.6	5-20	4-20
SI	5	.75	13.7	2.9	5-20	4-20
WS	5	.71	14.7	2.6	4-20	4-20

Note. Note PPS= Pretty Privilege, MI=Media Industry, SI=Social Interaction, WS= Work Setting = 400, k = No of items,  $\alpha$  = Cronbach Alpha, M = mean, SD = standard deviation.

Table 4 shows that the alpha values of Pretty Privilege and its subscales are satisfactory. The results show that the scale has strong internal consistency.

**Table 5** Composite Reliability and Validity of the Pretty Privilege Scale (PPS) (N=200)

	SI	WS	MI	CR	AVE
SI	<b>0.58</b>			0.80	0.5
WS	0.48	<b>0.49</b>		0.7	0.32
MI	0.55	0.723	<b>0.48</b>	0.9	0.4

**Note.** Values of squared root estimate of AVE are boldfaced. AVE = Average Variance Extracted; CR = Composite Reliability; MI=Media Industry, SI=Social Interaction, WS= Work Setting

AVE value of .4 is acceptable if the value of CR is above the acceptable range (Fornell & David, 1981). Analysis was performed to ensure the robustness of the scale and to establish the convergent and discriminant validity of the newly developed PPS.

### Discussion

The study aimed to create a psychometric tool for measuring pretty privilege in the Pakistani population. Due to the absence of widely accepted scales for beauty-based privileges, the study delved into existing literature, acknowledging the complexity of privilege, which spans various factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status. While physical appearance can impact societal perceptions, creating a universally applicable scale proved challenging.

Indeed, research has indicated that physical appearance can influence societal perceptions and opportunities, contributing to phenomena like "lookism" or appearance-based discrimination. However, the challenge lies in developing a comprehensive and universally applicable scale to measure privilege solely based on beauty, as this task is subjective and complex.

Acknowledging that privilege operates on multiple axes creating a tool to assess privileges linked to attractiveness, customized to suit the requirements of the Pakistani population, was imperative. Factor analysis identified three distinct domains, with 15 items out of 59 forming well-defined items. During the formulation of the scale, items related to Media Industry, Social Interaction, and Work Setting were retained after eliminating 44 items that did not contribute to a simple factor structure and exhibited cross-loading. The decision was based on factor loadings consistently above .40, adhering to established criteria (Stevens, 1992; Ejaz et al., 2020). In keeping with the specified criteria, the scale incorporated all remaining items. The concept of pretty privilege in this study was rooted in intersectionality and conflict theory. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions uncovered biases based on prettiness experienced in the Pakistani population, a topic largely unexplored by other researchers in the country. While there are qualitative studies on pretty privileges, they remain unpublished. The Pretty Privilege Scale (PPS) was developed specifically for the Pakistani population to measure biases or privileges related to beauty in social, workplace, and educational settings. Cultural and religious differences significantly influence the dynamics of pretty privileges, shaping societal perceptions of attractiveness and the associated advantages or disadvantages linked to physical appearance. Beauty standards vary across cultures, influenced by distinct ideals for features, body types, and skin tones. Global media trends impact these standards differently in various regions. Religious beliefs, emphasizing modesty and inner qualities over external appearances, also play a crucial role, contributing to unique beauty expectations through dictated dress codes.

This scale aims to comprehensively measure all domains of privileges based on beauty through a single, time-efficient tool. Rather than employing multiple scales to measure distinct positive emotions and subsequently comparing and calculating, psychologists can now utilize

the Pretty Privilege Scale (PPS). The total raw score provides an overall assessment of an individual's experience with pretty privileges, while scores on specific subscales can be calculated separately to analyze their relation to other variables. Higher scores indicate a greater ratio of pretty privileges, whereas lower scores signify a lower ratio. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to validate the factor structure and dimensionality of the scale. Results demonstrated that the measurement model was the best fit, with acceptable model fit indices exceeding satisfactory limits (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

The final version of the scale consists of 15 items across three well-defined factors, and this factor structure, initially developed through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), was validated through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) (Ahmad et al., 2020; Anjum et al., 2019). Assessing psychometric properties, the scale and its subscales demonstrated acceptable Alpha reliability, with only items fitting into one factor retained, resulting in high internal consistency. The subscales exhibit significant correlations with each other and with the total score of the Pretty Privilege Scale (PPS), confirming that they measure the same construct, as per Nunnally's criteria (1994). Convergent and discriminant validity were successfully established through measures such as composite reliability and average variance extracted (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

### **Limitation and Recommendations**

The current study successfully developed a valid and reliable scale; however, certain limitations exist. Data collection employed a purposive sampling technique, suggesting a recommendation for random sampling in future studies. Additionally, a larger sample size, particularly for exploratory factor analysis (EFA), is advised. While EFA and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were applied to establish internal structure, replicating the factor structure with diverse cross-cultural samples is essential for validating the psychometric characteristics of the PPS scale. This unique scale gauges privilege based on attractive appearance and is currently available in English for measuring positive emotion in the Pakistani population, with the potential for translation into other languages. Its versatile application spans various fields, including education, health, clinical, social, and occupational settings.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The study introduces an indigenous, quantitative, and time-efficient scale for assessing Pretty Privilege in the Pakistani population. Developed with consideration for its presence in society, the media industry, and job settings, the scale measures the impact of Pretty Privilege on societal perceptions based on appearance. It also gauges the advantages individuals gain due to their looks and attractiveness, making it valuable for exploring the effects of Pretty Privilege on people's lives. This reliable scale, applicable across various sectors, serves as a tool to examine attitudes and opinions about Pretty Privilege. It can also function as a feedback mechanism for individuals to align their goals accordingly. Being the first of its kind in Pakistan, this psychometric tool holds significance in the realm of social psychology, offering three subscales to measure Pretty Privilege in different settings through a single instrument. Additionally, it opens avenues for intervention-based studies.

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