

BE GLAD YOU'RE NOT BEAUTIFUL

• Experts explain the hazards of having physical loveliness

By ETHEL KAPLAN

● Beauty can be a problem. It can interfere with happiness, handicap a woman in her roles as wife and mother, and can even pose the threat of emotional illness.

FOR most women, it's a lifelong struggle — this heroic attempt to obtain, maintain, or regain beauty. And, like all wars, the battle for beauty takes a heavy toll in time, money, effort, and heartache.

So why do women persist in this frequently futile effort to vanquish nature and time? Partly because of a belief that, compared to the woman with an ordinary exterior, the beautiful woman has an easier and a happier life.

But when one studies legends, considers scientific opinion, and puts candid questions to beautiful women themselves, one discovers that beauty can actually interfere with happiness, and also handicap a woman in her crucial roles as wife and mother.

The curse of beauty is a recurring theme in many familiar fairytales.

Remember Snow White, whose stepmother ordered her murdered because the magic mirror proclaimed the little princess the fairest damsel in the kingdom? Then there was the Sleeping Beauty, sent into an almost eternal slumber because she was hated by an ugly old witch. Cinderella's troubles, too, stemmed from envy of her good looks, her evil stepsisters fearing the competition of her beauty.

Early in life girls are warned through such fables that if they grow up to be beauties they must expect to cope with the jealousy and hatred of women less "fortunate."

However, these legends learned in early childhood do not warn of a further danger of beauty.

In fairytales, the beautiful heroine also possesses a flawless character. Invariably, she is pictured as sweet, modest, loving, and totally undeserving of her suffering.

But in reality one of the major drawbacks of possessing a beautiful face and form is that, if overemphasised, these attributes may thwart healthy personality development.

Tolstoy, the famous Russian novelist, considered it "a strange illusion to suppose that beauty is goodness." His comment is supported by innumerable classical and biblical legends which illustrate time and time again that the

legends which illustrate time and time again that the beautiful woman is considered a troublemaker.

Consider, for example, the most famous beauty of all — Helen of Troy, the adulterous wife of Menelaus. Her face may have launched a thousand ships, but it also led to her own misery, the death of the man she loved, and the destruction of an entire civilisation.

Heartless beauties of the past

The Bible tells that King David's passion for Bathsheba drove him to plot the death of her husband. Samson lost his strength because he lost his heart to a beautiful Philistine named Delilah.

Why is the story of the heartless beauty who destroys her lover such an oft-told tale?

To the average person, a beautiful woman is, subconsciously, seen as a threat. No doubt there is some comfort in depicting one's rival as a villain. So, in real life, beautiful women are sometimes unjustly maligned by those who fear the power of their beauty.

However, it must also be admitted that many lovely and pampered children do grow up (like the fictional stereotype) into self-centred, cold, and inconsiderate adults.

"But beauty is an asset," you might argue. "Doesn't it help its possessor to feel content with herself, to win friends, to attract an enviable marriage partner, to bear more attractive children?"

Yes, beauty can do all that.

Still, it is no passport to happiness. Attractive people must be especially careful to avoid two serious emotional illnesses: (1) narcissism (self-love) so extreme that it prohibits love for others; (2) overdependence upon attrac-

tive appearance so that more durable and meaningful assets are not developed.

Beautiful women without these psychological disorders may find their good looks a definite advantage. But for those who fall into one or both of these emotional traps life can bring only a limited kind of happiness.

Both dangers are present even in early childhood. Psychiatrist Marvin Schwarz, of Chicago, points out that because the early years of life are most crucial in terms of character development, the problems of beautiful women stem directly from the problems of beautiful children.

"For some beautiful children, being the centre of attention becomes a way of life. And meaningful relations in life can never be derived and maintained purely by being the centre of attention. To be a successful wife and mother, a woman must be able to give as well as to receive."

Dr. Z. W. Wanderer, a Los Angeles psychotherapist and marriage counsellor, elaborates upon this same idea:

"We can't say that beauty precludes character, but a

"We can't say that beauty precludes character, but a girl starts out with a handicap from early childhood if she's a showpiece.

"Attractive little girls may tend to become performing dolls. A beautiful little girl's 'value system' can become concentrated upon being charming.

"But can a relationship as intense as marriage be based upon charm?

"Success reinforces behaviour patterns. If the child can get everything she needs through the use of charm, she may fail to develop more important character traits necessary to sustain intense adult relationships."

"As if they were made of diamond dust"

What can parents of a beautiful child do to guide the attractive youngster toward proper social and emotional development? Doctor Wanderer suggests, "Place the charm in the context of other social abilities — such as a sense of fair play and consideration for others. **Don't** let the child grow up with the idea that being beautiful is all the world wants of her. Sometimes beautiful little girls begin to act as if they were made of diamond dust."

Then imagine the difficult adjustment when the child grows out of the cute, fragile, little-girl stage and into the awkward pre-puberty stage.

Now she finds that her feminine appeal is no longer an adequate basis for sucking nutriment from her environment, that she is expected to fulfil academic, social, and familial obligations.

If, in earlier years, she had been expected to do nothing but keep clean and look pretty, readjustment at this stage will be a severe strain.

And once puberty is reached? Doctor Schwarz, a child psychiatrist who deals largely with adolescent girls, is particularly well qualified to comment on the problems of attractive teenagers. He says: "Although the teenage girl longs to be popular, when she becomes a sexual object of older boys the resulting stressful situation is hardly to her benefit.

"She must cope with the raw sexual desires of the teenage boy, but she has not the experience nor the emotional stability to do a good job of it."

Can the teenager with sexual conflicts turn to her mother for guidance?

"Frequently not," says Doctor Schwarz. "Rather than being supportive and understanding of the difficulties that teenage daughters face, some mothers are jealous because they are no longer involved in the love chase.

"Others subtly encourage their daughters' promiscuity to get vicarious thrills.

"These problems exist because modern society does not allow for a graceful transition from sexual primacy to

maturity. Unfortunately, today, rather than seeing adulthood as the period of greatest satisfaction and gratification in life, many women see it as a displacement from a life zenith somewhere in adolescence."

More pitfalls await the beautiful woman when she attempts to select, win, hold, and be content with an appropriate mate.

One danger: She may painstakingly search for a man who will enhance her physical image, without bothering to consider his suitability in other ways. ("John and I look so good together.")

Then, all too frequently, the attractive woman is chosen as a marriage partner primarily because of her beauty. Although a well-known calypso song advises men to "marry a woman uglier than you," few are willing to do so.

Role of good looks in mate selection

First of all, Doctor Wanderer points out, the advice goes against nature. In all of nature, beauty plays an important role in mate selection.

Probably this tendency is related to Darwin's theory of natural selection, for studies show that traits which are admired as physically attractive tend also to be indicators of good health (for example, a clear complexion).

It's important to a man that "his" woman be desirable not only to himself but to other men as well. (Or, at least, he must believe that other men desire her.) Doctor Wanderer explains why:

"A man's masculinity is so central to his whole being that he needs to have it reaffirmed by possessing an attractive woman."

Thus, he may fall in love with external beauty, blinding himself to internal ugliness — or even to internal assets.

This masculine emphasis upon externals is a frustrating factor for many attractive single women.

"I know all I have to do is smile at that fellow standing by the door and he'll come rushing over to ask me out," admitted a former teenage beauty queen.

"But so what? I'm tired of compliments on my big blue eyes. How I'd like a man to realise that I have some intelligence, some depth!"

The attractive wife who is also perceptive and sensitive will resent a husband who views her as an object, as a pretty new toy he's proud to possess.

One unhappy bride summed up her shaky marriage by saying, "I know now that Burt married me to take this beautiful thing and dress her and adorn her and show her off. He uses me to satisfy his own ego. He doesn't understand that I'm a human being, not a teenage-type doll."

A more calculating woman, sensing that she is adored

A more calculating woman, sensing that she is adored primarily for her sex appeal, will dangle her seductiveness as a reward. But, conversely, there's the case of Lorraine, a luscious, slender redhead whose husband was unfaithful. She "punished" him by gaining so much weight that she became extremely unattractive.

More commonly, an attractive woman becomes obsessively concerned with maintaining her beauty as the only weapon she has for holding her husband in marital bondage.

As her beauty fades, she begins to fear that her husband is actually seeking (or at least craving) younger, more attractive sex partners.

Says Doctor Schwarz, "A major need of the man is to be adequate, whereas a woman's main task in life may be to be lovable.

"If she depends solely upon her looks to make her lovable, she will become frightened when they begin to fade. And, after all, holding on to beauty is a losing battle from age 20 on."

● This article is reprinted
from "Today's Health,"
published by the American
Medical Association.

Futile though the fight may be, every decade the army of warriors against time increases in number and vigor.

Because of improved cosmetics and new medical techniques, beauty seems accessible to far more women today than it was, say, 50 years ago.

So there are countless pathetic examples of women who devote their mature years to making the rounds from shop to shop to have grey hair brightened, large pores shrunk, the faint hint of a moustache removed, padded bras custom-fitted, ample hips steamed away, and bulging thighs pounded off.

Then they go from doctor to doctor seeking skin treatments for inconspicuous blemishes, nose bobs for nearly perfect profiles, facelifts to remove almost invisible wrinkles, and cottage cheese diets to squeeze perfect SSW figures into roomy XSSW dresses.

And what's forgotten? That the woman who retains the attitude of youth has a much more powerful magnet than one who keeps only the appearance of youth.

Still another marital problem: The beautiful woman is used to being pursued. Even after she no longer needs her beauty as husband-hunting bait, she is likely to continue to use her looks to attract masculine attention.

Is she capable

Is she capable of loving another?

Vanity which was well nourished in childhood will continue to crave sustenance in adult years. When her husband does not satisfy her hunger for admiration, the narcissistic woman may turn to other men and then feel guilty about doing so.

Infidelity may be a greater temptation for the attractive woman because she is more sought after as a love partner and because, if she has developed no assets besides her beauty, she may need frequent affairs to convince herself that men still find her appealing.

Perhaps the greatest challenge that marriage presents to the beautiful woman is this: Is she capable of loving another person more than herself?

If as a child she never needed to feel and to display love in order to receive it, if she has grown up knowing only self-love, she is likely to deny her husband the most important gift he craves from her.

In her classic study of the feminine situation, "The Second Sex," Simone de Beauvoir says succinctly, "A stubborn narcissist will be limited in . . . love for want of the ability to give herself."

To explain more fully, Miss Beauvoir quotes the German philosopher Nietzsche:

"The single word 'love,' in fact, signifies two different things for man and woman.

"What woman understands by love is clear enough: it is not only devotion, it is a total gift of body and soul, without reservation, without regard for anything whatever . . . As for man, if he loves a woman, what he wants is that love from her."

The narcissistic woman is likely to fail her husband because, as Miss Beauvoir points out, "the woman truly in love soon forgets her ego; but many women are incapable of a genuine love affair, precisely because they never forget themselves."

Difficult as marriage may be for the narcissistic woman, pregnancy and childbearing may be even more traumatic.

Knowing that pregnancy diminishes sexual attractiveness, many firm narcissists become pregnant most reluctantly, only after displaying great resistance.

The later months of pregnancy, which bring physical discomfort and restriction of activities, are trying for any woman.

For the beautiful woman, they may be especially so. Just when she feels the greatest need for reassurance, she loses her bodily charms and therefore fears loss of attention, loss of love.

Then the narcissistic woman may hate motherhood even more than she did pregnancy. The child, after all, needs to be loved. While the narcissist wants to be the object of love, she cannot give it.

Not only is she unable to love the child, but she may even come to dislike it — particularly if the infant succeeds in stealing the family spotlight from her.

can come to dislike it — particularly if the infant succeeds in stealing the family spotlight from her.

As the years pass, daughters especially are likely to encounter increased antagonism from narcissistic mothers.

When the youngster matures and becomes an interesting personality in her own right, she is even more likely to be viewed as a competitor for the father's attention.

Then, later, the child's age reveals that her mother is not as young as she tries to look. If the child grows up to be attractive, the mother's resentment will be heightened, for how can she successfully compete with a younger version of herself?

If, on the other hand, the child is homely, the mother may dislike having anything ugly so closely associated with herself.



THE LATE MARILYN MONROE. Did her beauty ruin her marriages and make her self-absorbed, discontented, unloving? Did it spoil her chances of a full and happy life?

"Beauty is its own excuse for being," wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson. But pity the woman who applies this statement to herself and uses it as an excuse to neglect developing

Emerson. But pity the woman who applies this statement to herself and uses it as an excuse to neglect developing her mind, character, talents, and capacity to love.

She is flirting with misery because, according to Doctor Schwarz, the greatest safeguard against unhappiness is the development of a maximum number of ways to cope with challenging situations.

Undoubtedly, many beautiful women can build lives rich with accomplishment and affection.

Those who do succeed because they are able to view their attractiveness in proper perspective. They are not hopelessly vain nor totally dependent upon their looks.

For these happy women, could beauty have been, in fact, an aid to successful living? Perhaps. Doctor Schwarz points out that love is one of the major nutriments of life and that the beautiful little girl does tend to have an easier time obtaining love.

Annie didn't invite "too many pretty girls"

Good looks, and the attention and affection they generally inspire, can help a child develop a valuable sense of security and self-confidence.

The paradox involved is well illustrated by Doctor Wanderer's remark that the possession of beauty presents "a happy problem." The emotionally healthy, beautiful woman must still cope with the neurotic responses that insecure adults display toward her.

Other women, because they are jealous and afraid of being outclassed, will sometimes be cruel, as to an adorable teenager who was not invited to a classmate's boy-meet-girl party because, as she explained between sobs, "Annie just doesn't want too many pretty girls there."

Men also tend to be a bit frightened of beautiful women. And the beautiful woman who is also intelligent and knowledgeable may scare off all but the most self-confident of suitors.

Psychiatrist David Friedman speculates that the phrase "beautiful but dumb" may be a reflection of wishful thinking! The insecure male wants to believe that a beautiful woman is stupid because then she seems less of a threat to his masculinity.

Doctor Friedman writes: "Those of my male patients who have expressed the opinion 'beautiful but dumb' have shown a combination of characteristics.

"They have all had feelings of inadequacy as men, have been excessively competitive, have been exhibitionistic, and have been overtly contemptuous of women whom they unconsciously fear."

The beautiful youngster, too, may be viewed as a threat by her peers. Still, her appearance has definite prestige

value and helps to make her more popular than her plainer classmates.

classmates.

Psychological studies show that, in elementary school classrooms, children rated by adults as being most attractive also tended to be listed by their classmates as best-liked. But, by the age of 15, feminine attractiveness is an aid in heterosexual friendships only.

According to further research, late-teen students subordinate static beauty and emphasise expressive behaviour and affectionate disposition.

These studies seem to suggest that, once past the mid-teens, beauty diminishes in importance, becomes less and less of an aid in establishing satisfactory relationships with members of either sex.

"Another humbling thought," says Doctor Wanderer, "is the realisation that beauty is culture-bound. We certainly can't understand what a Zulu chief sees in his wife.

"But our concept of beauty is no more valid than his. It is not absolute and universal like some of our other values, such as the importance of compassion and the pursuit of truth."

Standards of beauty also vary with personal taste. Every man in love sees beauty in the face of his beloved.

To quote the 18th-century poet John Gay, "*Love can beautify in what seem faults to every common eye.*"

Conversely, people tend to underrate those they dislike in all areas, including physical appearance. So it is impossible to say with certainty that Jane is plain and Georgia is gorgeous.

This problem of subjectivity explains the scarcity of scientific data on beautiful women and justifies the hypothetical nature of all statements made about them.

"Beauty doesn't guarantee happiness"

It would be a serious error to conclude that every beautiful woman is bound to suffer because of her looks. As Doctor Schwarz remarked, "We started out to talk about the problems of beautiful women and wound up talking about beautiful women with problems."

But it can safely be said that the pursuit of beauty as an all-consuming goal is foolish because, even if beauty is attained, its possession does not guarantee happiness.

Then what does? This question calls to mind the occasion when Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, was asked, "What do you think a normal person should be able to do well?"

The questioner was probably expecting a long, complicated, and almost incomprehensible reply. But Freud simply said, "To love and to work."

When beauty interferes with the ability to do either, then it is, indeed, a curse.