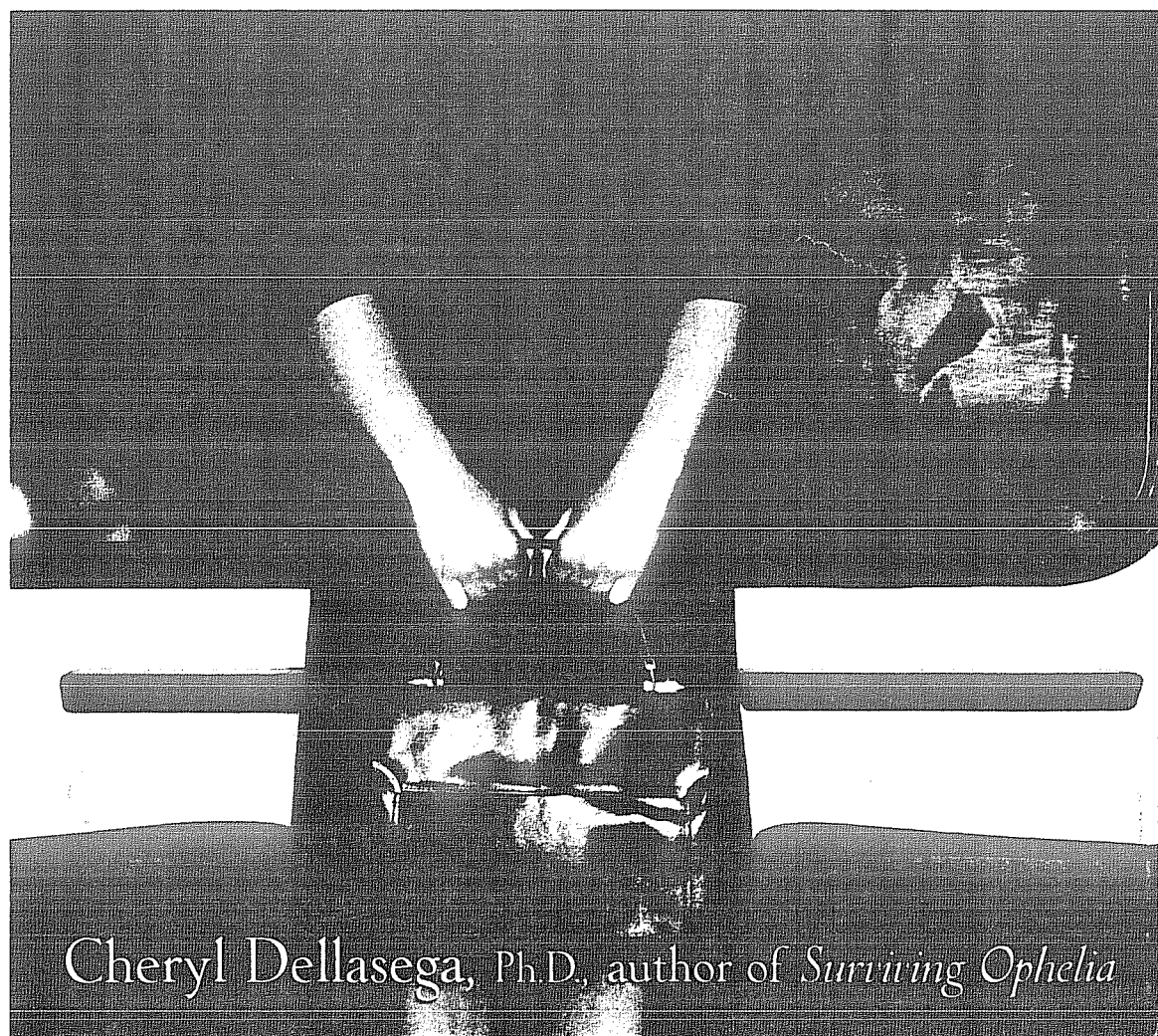


ADULT WOMEN WHO ARE STILL QUEEN BEES,  
MIDDLE BEES, AND AFRAID-TO-BEES

# mean girls grown up



Cheryl Dellasega, Ph.D., author of *Surviving Ophelia*

claims to be handicapped by her looks. The book *The Power of Beauty* by Nancy Friday cites studies that show beautiful women receive higher salaries and other benefits because of their appearance, thereby positioning them for resentment from other women. It is harder to be an attractive woman than an attractive man: studies show women are more hostile toward glamorous individuals from their same sex than men are.

Many women have written about situations in which an attractive female gets treated aggressively (that is, "stung") solely on the basis of her looks and then responds with either aggressive or passive behavior. Beautiful women admit they often choose to befriend other beautiful women for this reason.

Jess, a college student, told me, "Attractive girls tend to associate only with other attractive girls for the most part, and they joke about those who are perceived as less attractive. Ethnic groups do the same thing. They only associate with people of the same ethnic background (that is, blacks stay with blacks, whites stay with whites)."

Another source of targeting for women is body size. Those who are thinner often receive both praise and putdowns for their physique, regardless of whether they come by their build through genetics or the gym. In a newsletter article about eating disorders, one college coed commented that it wasn't the catcalls and comments of guys that made her self-conscious about her body, it was the calculating looks of women who "sized her up."

Even in ways that are almost comical, women can use appearance to put another woman down, as the following story shows.

### Toe to Toe

SHERILYN LEE

I didn't think it was such a big deal. If I got to it, I got to it. If I didn't, I didn't. Besides, I agonize over other things. For example, my face is peeled and waxed at three-week intervals. I apply lip liner, because lipstick alone isn't enough. As an engineer, I wear clean, matching clothes that were purchased after I graduated from college. I watch how much and what I eat. My hair stylist selects my cut and color, because the style I want

isn't always the one I can wear well. I floss. But none of my conscientious self-care mattered when two women from my company's accounting department studied my feet.

"I just can't go out wearing open-toed shoes without painted toenails," said the one from accounts receivable to the other from accounts payable.

They grinned at each other. Their faceless, uniformed army of perfectly painted toenails outnumbered me two to one, and I was ambushed.

Up to this point in my life, the only attention my size six-and-a-half feet ever received was preceded by the exclamation, "Look how tiny your feet are!" Now I couldn't even look at my naked feet without feeling differently about them.

I admit my toenails do look nicer when I paint them, but this requires planning and effort. My painted toes don't look just right until I put lotion on them, which leads to selecting the right shoes, which affects my clothes and jewelry choices. Toenail management begins innocently but quickly becomes oppressive.

My boss walked into my office as I mumbled something unprofessional and uncharitable about the company's pedicure jury. I responded to his puzzled look by unleashing the details of my encounter with the accounting department.

He shrugged his shoulders. "My wife does hers while watching Oprah."

She does. I could. But, above all, he doesn't ever have to.

As Sherilyn shows, even the tiniest detail of a woman's appearance can set her apart from her peers and create the potential for targeting. Basically, any woman who challenges the status quo may become at risk for victimization. Like her beautiful counterpart, she stands out because she is different and therefore a potential threat. Consider Marissa's experience: "When we moved, my husband's boss suggested we buy a house in an old, established community where several of his coworkers already lived. The week we arrived, a party was held to greet us, and I thought the other women, most of whom were stay-at-home moms like me, would become a wonderful group of new friends," Marissa confided.

Unfortunately, Marissa soon found herself trying in every way she could think of to break into a clique of women who were