



# Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty

By Nancy Etcoff

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A provocative and thoroughly researched inquiry into what we find beautiful and why, skewering the myth that the pursuit of beauty is a learned behavior.

In *Survival of the Prettiest*, Nancy Etcoff, a faculty member at Harvard Medical School and a practicing psychologist at Massachusetts General Hospital, argues that beauty is neither a cultural construction, an invention of the fashion industry, nor a backlash against feminism—it's in our biology.

Beauty, she explains, is an essential and ineradicable part of human nature that is revered and ferociously pursued in nearly every civilization—and for good reason. Those features to which we are most attracted are often signals of fertility and fecundity. When seen in the context of a Darwinian struggle for survival, our sometimes extreme attempts to attain beauty—both to become beautiful ourselves and to acquire an attractive partner—suddenly become much more understandable. Moreover, if we understand how the desire for beauty is innate, then we can begin to work in our own interests, and not just the interests of our genetic tendencies.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Amazon.com Review**

In the latter part of the 20th century, the adage "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" has evolved far beyond its original intent as an admonition against false vanity to become a cultural manifesto used to explain phenomena as diverse as the art of Andy Warhol and the rise of a multi-billion-dollar cosmetics industry. But is there something more to human reaction to beauty than a conditioned response to social cues? Yes, says Harvard Medical School psychologist Nancy Etcoff. *Survival of the Prettiest* argues persuasively that looking good has survival value, and that sensitivity to beauty is a biological adaptation governed by brain circuits shaped by natural selection.

Etcoff synthesizes a fascinating array of scientific research and cultural analysis in support of her thesis. Psychologists find that babies stare significantly longer at the faces adults find appealing, while the mothers of "attractive" babies display more intense bonding behaviors. The symmetrical face of average proportions may have become the optimal design because of evolutionary pressures operating against population extremes. Gentlemen may prefer blondes not so much for their hair color as for the fairness of their skin--which makes it easier to detect the flush of sexual excitement. And high heels accentuate a woman's breasts and buttocks, signaling fertility. Is beauty programmed into our brain circuits as a proxy for health and youth? In marked contrast to other writers like Naomi Wolf (*The Beauty Myth*), Etcoff argues that it is, noting, "Rather than denigrate one source of women's power, it would seem far more useful for feminists to attempt to elevate all sources of women's power." --*Patrizia DiLucchio*

### **From Publishers Weekly**

In riveting style, Etcoff, a psychologist at Harvard Medical School, demolishes the belief that beauty is a cultural construct, arguing instead "that beauty is a universal part of human experience, and that it provokes pleasure, rivets attention, and impels actions that help ensure the survival of our genes." By drawing widely from anthropological, psychological, biological and archeological literature, Etcoff discerns surprising similarities in the ways humans have perceived and responded to beauty across diverse cultures throughout the millennia. For example, cross-cultural research comparing two isolated Indian tribes in Venezuela and Paraguay to people in three Western cultures demonstrated a remarkable similarity in what is considered beautiful. And evidence that red pigments were used as lipstick as long ago as 5000 B.C. suggests that media images are not the sole reason that "in the United States more money is spent on beauty than on education or social services." The most important message in this book is that we cannot ignore our evolutionary past when attempting to understand our current behavior, even as we should recognize that we need not be slaves to our genes. Topics as wide-ranging as penis- or breast-enlargement surgery and the basics of haute couture are treated with wit and insight. Etcoff's arguments are certain to initiate a great deal of discussion. Photos and illustrations. Author tour.

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### **Review**

"Authoritative and surprisingly entertaining." —*Chicago Tribune*

"*Survival of the Prettiest* is the first book to pull all of the science on beauty into one lively yet thoughtful package, showing again that it's not just ax-grinding males who believe that biology continues to play an important role in our lives." —*The New York Times Book Review*

"Through a series of global scientific studies, Etcoff . . . presents a compelling argument for why so many

cultures are influenced by beauty." —*The Boston Globe*

"Nancy Etcoff . . . writes confidently that today's culture of beauty is not a backlash against feminism. She delves into why we devour fashion magazines, agonize about waist sizes, and gaze longingly at objects of desire." —*Houston Chronicle*

"[A] sprightly, spunky, well-written treatise on the Darwinian science of looking good." —*Entertainment Weekly*

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Do you have favorite book? For those who have, what is your favorite's book? Publication is very important thing for us to be aware of everything in the world. Each book has different aim or maybe goal; it means that book has different type. Some people sense enjoy to spend their time to read a book. They may be reading whatever they take because their hobby is usually reading a book. Why not the person who don't like studying a book? Sometime, person feel need book when they found difficult problem as well as exercise. Well, probably you will need this *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty*.

#### Arlene Farmer:

Often the book *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty* has a lot associated with on it. So when you read this book you can get a lot of advantage. The book was written by the very famous author. This articles author makes some research previous to write this book. This book very easy to read you can get the point easily after scanning this book.

#### Edgar Curtis:

Playing with family in a park, coming to see the marine world or hanging out with good friends is thing that usually you might have done when you have spare time, and then why you don't try point that really opposite from that. One activity that make you not experience tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you are ride on and with addition info. Even you love *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty*, you could enjoy both. It is very good combination right, you still desire to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh come on its mind hangout folks. What? Still don't understand it, oh come on its called reading friends.

#### Mark Authement:

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