



Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty

Nancy Etcoff

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Beauty is not a myth. According to scientist and psychologist Nancy Etcoff, the pursuit of beauty is neither a cultural construction, an invention of Madison Avenue, nor a backlash against feminism.

Survival of the Prettiest, the first in-depth scientific inquiry into the nature of human beauty, posits that beauty is an essential and ineradicable part of human nature, from what makes a face beautiful to the deepest questions about the human condition. Every human civilization has revered beauty, pursued it at enormous costs, and endured both the tragic and the comic consequences of that pursuit.

Provocative, witty, and insightful, Etcoff sheds light on every aspect of human beauty, including why we devour fashion magazines, check our waistlines, and gaze longingly at objects of desire. Informed by state-of-the-art theories of the human mind from cognitive science and evolutionary biology, **Survival of the Prettiest** tells us why gentlemen prefer blondes, why high heels have never gone out of style, why eyebrows are plucked and hair is coiffed. Etcoff also explains how sexual preference is guided by ancient rules that make us most attracted to those with whom we are most likely to reproduce. Research on why we find infant features irresistibly attractive, as well as controversial new work that suggests parents show more affection to attractive newborns, is part of a broad investigation that includes insights into how beauty influences our perceptions, attitudes, and behavior toward others.

When the attainment of beauty is viewed in the context of a Darwinian struggle for survival, many of the most extreme practices surrounding our looks, such as body piercing and serial plastic surgeries, suddenly seem less outlandish. In fact, those very practices may ensure the survival of our genes. Agree or disagree, you will never think about human beauty the same way again.

From the Hardcover edition.

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