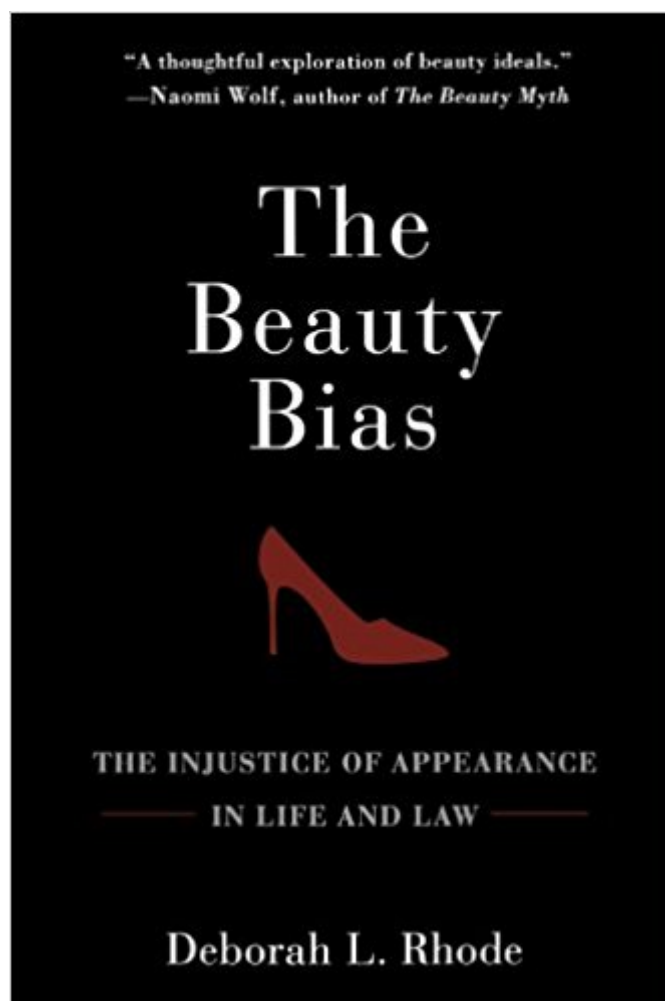


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# The Beauty Bias: The Injustice Of Appearance In Life And Law



## Synopsis

"It hurts to be beautiful" has been a cliché for centuries. What has been far less appreciated is how much it hurts not to be beautiful. The Beauty Bias explores our cultural preoccupation with attractiveness, the costs it imposes, and the responses it demands. Beauty may be only skin deep, but the damages associated with its absence go much deeper. Unattractive individuals are less likely to be hired and promoted, and are assumed less likely to have desirable traits, such as goodness, kindness, and honesty. Three quarters of women consider appearance important to their self image and over a third rank it as the most important factor. Although appearance can be a significant source of pleasure, its price can also be excessive, not only in time and money, but also in physical and psychological health. Our annual global investment in appearance totals close to \$200 billion. Many individuals experience stigma, discrimination, and related difficulties, such as eating disorders, depression, and risky dieting and cosmetic procedures. Women bear a vastly disproportionate share of these costs, in part because they face standards more exacting than those for men, and pay greater penalties for falling short. The Beauty Bias explores the social, biological, market, and media forces that have contributed to appearance-related problems, as well as feminism's difficulties in confronting them. The book also reviews why it matters.

Appearance-related bias infringes fundamental rights, compromises merit principles, reinforces debilitating stereotypes, and compounds the disadvantages of race, class, and gender. Yet only one state and a half dozen localities explicitly prohibit such discrimination. The Beauty Bias provides the first systematic survey of how appearance laws work in practice, and a compelling argument for extending their reach. The book offers case histories of invidious discrimination and a plausible legal and political strategy for addressing them. Our prejudices run deep, but we can do far more to promote realistic and healthy images of attractiveness, and to reduce the price of their pursuit.

## Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (July 14, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0199794448

ISBN-13: 978-0199794447

Product Dimensions: 8.1 x 0.8 x 5.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.5 out of 5 stars 13 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #685,130 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #89 in Books > Law > Constitutional Law > Discrimination #100 in Books > Law > Legal Theory & Systems > Gender & the Law #201 in Books > Law > Specialties > Labor Law

## Customer Reviews

Beauty is in the eye of the job-holder, evidently. Referencing *Plessy v. Ferguson* (the 1896 Supreme Court decision affirming "separate but equal" racial policies) is proven more than apropos in Rhodes' riveting overview of the ways in which appearance impacts hiring practices and job qualifications, in both overt and subtle ways. Legal or illegal is often beside the point when it comes to cases like those she surveys, though there are civil rights issues that immediately spring to mind for scholars in this field. The author's own experience with appearance expectations in the seemingly egalitarian world of academia notwithstanding, most of the cases and examples she provides are unfortunately not surprising. Covering a range of social classes, and tackling issues ranging from weight bias to the legality of forcing a college professor to change hairstyles, the book raises issues that will be debated for years to come. Rhodes argues that in jurisdictions with provisions protecting individuals from appearance-related discrimination in the workplace, the courts are not clogged with cases, contrary to the assumption of critics. Rhodes' analysis includes many new cases for the edification of students and readers interested in law, sociology, or business. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"The book is illuminating and important: it explores the often unacknowledged, yet pervasive, discrimination against people, particularly women, who don't conform to mainstream notions of beauty and appearance [Rhode] is the one of the country's leading scholars in legal ethics and gender Rhode is incredibly prolific."--Danielle Citron, *Concurring Opinions*"[Rhode] is convincing in her arguments that laws punishing appearance discrimination might be a logical step in exactly the right direction it's hard to deny the validity of the problem that she confronts. And it's even harder to ignore the extent to which concerns about appearance shape our daily lives. Rhode so clearly enumerates the costs to society incurred by appearance discrimination that readers judges and lawmakers included will find themselves unsettled."--*Christian Science Monitor*"Provocative Rhode is at her most persuasive when arguing that in the United States, the penchant to discriminate against unattractive women (and also short men) is as pernicious and widespread as bias based on race, sex, age, ethnicity, religion, and disability. She provides overwhelming evidence of bias

against the overweight, the unattractive, and the aging. And while some of these cases may be covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act or race discrimination law, most are not."--Dahlia Lithwick, Slate.com

"This book is extremely well written. There are plenty of everyday examples of appearance discrimination and the book is written with a passion and enthusiasm that sweeps the reader along...a call to arms...No doubt it will create a considerable body of literature and much debate."--Legal Studies

"Rhode writes clearly and thinks deeply. I found her case convincing morally and legally."--Dallas Morning News

"This is a well-researched and thoughtful exploration of beauty ideals in legal, professional and other hard-hitting real-life spheres. A serious contribution to the literature of the politics of appearance."--Naomi Wolf, author of *The Beauty Myth*

"Rhode's insightful analysis and lively writing style brilliantly lays out the ways in which prescriptions about appearance, whether mandated by the law, influenced by the billion dollar cosmetics industry, or the leaders of social movements, affect people's opportunities and their everyday lives."--Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, Past President, American Sociological Association; Professor of Sociology, CUNY Graduate Center

"When the fastest-growing medical specialty is cosmetic surgery, we should all be concerned. Deborah Rhode's analysis offers real insight into what compels our 'beauty behavior,' the economic consequences, and what we can-and must-do about it. This book should be on every woman's bookshelf."--Kim Gandy, Former President, National Organization for Women

"Deborah Rhode uncovers 'beauty bias' as an obstacle for women every bit as disabling as sex or gender discrimination, but more damaging because it is virtually immune to legal challenge. Her discourse and strategies for ending appearance discrimination speak to every woman and should be supported by all people concerned with social justice."--Herma Hill Kay, University of California, Berkeley School of Law

Good: This book addresses a very important topic, raises a lot of relevant issues, makes some important points, and is pretty short

Bad: The arguments are often pretty fast - Rhode prefers to skim over a lot of the key issues in feminism by glossing over things and deciding to focus on "refocusing the feminist critique" (pg 88) which is really just code for 'I'm going to ignore a lot of the deeper challenges to my work that come from various strands of feminism and instead make fairly uncontroversial points.' For a topic this interesting it would be good to have a more detailed, strenuously defended argument. As it stands, sympathetic readers are going to wish there was more substance, and hostile readers are going to find plenty of holes to poke. The book also contains a few factual mistakes and hasty over-generalizations, which it could certainly have done without.

Overall: Worth reading if you're interested in the topic and want to get some of the issues

out onto the table, but not so great for digging really deep and figuring stuff out for good.

This book has a really great idea about how there is a beauty bias and the discrimination between those who are attractive and those who are not. But I wish the author were less repetitive and instead wrote more about the psychological aspects for why this bias exists and what we can do. The book is basically a long list of various types of biases and repetition. I was really excited when I read the description of the book but was disappointed when I actually read it.

The topic of the book is very interesting yet I felt like a paper would have been more appropriate because after chapter 3 it is just too repetitive. The introduction gives a good idea and actually makes you expect a lot from the book, however I feel that it actually gives the whole book away because after it there are no more surprises, same examples, same arguments with no more depth or data.

The product was exactly what I needed and it arrived promptly.

Very interesting, but too technical for "in bed reading". I didn't finish reading it. I usually find that books by journalists are fun and easy to read and books by professors are not.

Excellent stuff.

The book puts a lot into perspective and makes you think about "beauty" in a different context. The legal angle was a new one for me and I really enjoyed the writing.

The title notwithstanding, the book isn't really about "the beauty bias" as either a psychological or social phenomenon (Rhode is a lawyer, not a social scientist). It is rather about appearance discrimination in general, focusing mostly on discrimination based on race, disability, and obesity. I have no trouble believing such bias exists; sadly, though, Rhode does very little to prove it. Rarely have I seen a valid point so poorly argued. Rhode's argument is ill-supported, faulty in logic, frequently off-topic, and repetitious. I'm not sure how one manages to continuously repeat oneself in only 161 pages of text, but Rhode accomplishes it. Overall, the book gives the impression of having been an over-long law review article that the law students at most major universities justifiably declined to publish. The major problem with the book is that Rhode does not seem capable of

formulating a coherent argument starting from a well-supported premise to a logical conclusion. Instead, she starts with some irrelevant personal anecdotes, throws around a number of disorganized facts gathered and claims made by others, impugns appearance-based discrimination with only minimal and unsatisfactory refutation of counterarguments, and makes some mostly arbitrary policy recommendations unsupported by any evidence of their effectiveness. By the end, the impression is that you have been the victim of a peroration rather than a scholarly work, and been made to pay for it in the bargain. One irony here is that I believe the problem Rhode discusses, identified by psychologists long ago (taking one incarnation as the "Halo Effect"), is perfectly real and deserves serious consideration. Another is that this book is written by a chaired professor of law at Stanford Law School, conventionally ranked among the highest in the country. It is published by one of the most prestigious academic publishers in the world. Both of which prove that reputation ranks among the least reliable indicators of quality. This gives me an idea for another book: "The Unmerited Reputation Bias." I want back my money and the 6 hours of my life spent reading this.

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