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**Deborah L. Rhode, The Beauty Bias. The Injustice of Appearance in Life and Law. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010, 272 pp.**

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## Book reviews

**Deborah L. Rhode, *The Beauty Bias. The Injustice of Appearance in Life and Law*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010, 272 pp.**

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Deborah Rhode begins her book with a description of the coaching she received at the hands of her colleagues, especially as pertaining to her hair style and clothing choices, when she began her academic career. As is typically the case for academics, or at least the stereotype of academics, she was initially taken aback by the colleagues' advice to alter her physical appearance since academics are expected to be valued for their mental prowess rather than their appearance. It is not uncommon for women professionals to be pressured to appear a certain way and to alter their appearance if so dictated by colleagues, mainly male colleagues. (I had the same experience myself in 1983 when I began my professorships.) This experience as a new professor, as related, is a good starting point since it questions the purpose of social pressures to appear in any particular manner, for example, to be well-dressed (in other words, femininely dressed) and to have one's hair arranged in such a way as to be socially acceptable. In Rhode's case, it was of particular significance to her colleagues, if not herself, to have the correct physical appearance because of her prominence in her profession (law). Her prominence and thus her visibility, as she informs the readership, made her physical representation important.

From this point, the seven chapters she offers overview the costs of appearance enhancement, appearance bias and the media, technology and the pursuit of beauty, advertising as exerted pressure to be attractive, feminism's influence on appearance and appearance discrimination, biological foundations of appearance standards, history of appearance standards and discrimination, the relationships between appearance and social-demographic traits (gender, race and ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status), similarities between appearance bias and sexual harassment, US and European comparisons on appearance discrimination, false marketing of appearance-enhancements (for example, weight loss programs), laws that have been enacted to challenge (successfully or not) appearance discrimination, and policy changes that might be made to reduce appearance discrimination.

Appearance bias is a very worthwhile topic of worldwide importance. The topic should be examined at all levels and disseminated to a wide array of audiences: academics, students, the general public, policy makers, and others.

But this worthy topic has already been well-examined. For that reason, it would be impossible to review Rhode's book without reviewing my own since the two books so stunningly resemble each other. Indeed, as will be shown below, the topics covered in both books converge almost entirely. My book, *Beauty Bias: Discrimination and Social Power*, was published in 2007, three years prior to Rhode's book.

Of the topics covered in Rhode's book, 64 of them were previously discussed in my book. Correspondingly, approximately 50 of the citations in my book were repeated in Rhode's book. And a number of the same legal cases were addressed in both books. As to topics, among those that were described in detail in 2007 (by me) and in 2010 (by

Rhode), are: foot surgery for damage repair and for beautification, foot binding, height, weight, hair, skin color, skin bleaching, the financial cost of appearance alterations, the time it takes to make oneself attractive, the effects of appearance on income, the effects of appearance on personal relationships, the evolutionary factors (notably, physical appearance as a sign of fertility), media depictions of appearance bias, race, gender, age, disability, conspicuous consumption (*à la* Thorstein Veblen), the pseudoscience of cosmetics and cosmeceuticals, the choice to alter one's appearance or not, the (non)effect of feminism on appearance bias, stereotypes associated with appearance (such as fat equals lazy), the question of whether appearance bias is just or unjust, social change and activism (for instance fat acceptance movements), public awareness and education as remedies for appearance bias, sumptuary laws, disability law and appearance discrimination, clothing standards as varied by gender, steroid use, body dysmorphic disorder, beauty contests, advertising, the hydraulic model of weight control, cosmetic surgery (risks of, increases in, gender ratios, etc.), double standards across gender for appearance, the double bind for women of being too beautiful or not beautiful enough, the lack of cohesiveness among the appearance-challenged, the voluntary versus involuntary nature of socially-determined unattractiveness (obesity versus deformities), "ugly laws," the medical profession's influence on appearance bias, and so on.

The same legal cases are covered in both books. I had detailed discrimination as visited against employees or potential employees in situations as diverse as Abercrombie and Fitch (the clothiers), L'Oreal (the cosmetics corporation), airlines, McDonald's (the fast food restaurant), and Jazzercise (a gym). Rhode describes the same cases.

Less troubling are the repetitive sources. After all, it would be expected that two scholars studying the same phenomenon, for example, migration patterns among rural Chinese, would assemble many of the same citations. And it is a common practice for researchers to use secondary and even tertiary sources (citations gathered from others' work), rather than primary ones (data gathered by the author or research team explicitly for the project). Interestingly, some of the sources in my 2007 and later [2008] work are fairly exotic, archaic, and not readily accessible without deep exploration or perhaps not even known about outside of a longstanding scholar's personal library. It is, of course, conceivable that Rhode had access to the same hard-to-find and vintage sociological sources that I, as a sociologist of many years, have in my library. Nor is this to say, as I have made clear above, that there is anything amiss with using another researcher's sources.

Shared citations are not troubling on a scientific level. It is well to point out, however, the distinction between search and research. A primary goal of any science is the pursuit of new findings and new analyses. Even when we do not have new and original information, we are expected to offer a new way of examining and interpreting the available information describing that phenomenon.

The author was aware that a book with a remarkably similar title, covering the same topics, using the same legal cases, and arriving at the same conclusions (including recommendations for the future to reduce appearance bias) was published three years prior to the publication of her book. My 2007 work is cited in Rhode's chapter notes, although my work is not cited in the rather sparse index nor in the main body of the text.

My beauty bias book has sold well, has been adopted for classroom use, and has been translated into at least one other language besides English. Its coverage is broad: In

addition to these topics mentioned above, my book addresses the history of appearance bias (for example, changing social views on appearance standards, the eugenics movement, etc.), normalization of appearance “deficiencies” (such as obesity), the international scope and globalization of appearance standards, unusual surgeries (leg-lengthening surgeries, full face transplants, penile transplants, for example), migration patterns and the effect on obesity, the use of growth hormones, scarification, the effect of capitalism on marketing of size-friendly services and products, and sociological theories to explain appearance bias. I also offer a filmography of appearance-bias films.

By contrast, there is very little original in Rhode’s book except for new examples, such as the prejudice faced by the popular singer Susan Boyle compared to my description of Deborah Voigt’s ordeal as an overweight opera singer, and a discussion about the advantages that Sarah Palin has enjoyed as a political and media figure due to her attractiveness. (Boyle and Palin were not in the celebrity pantheon when I wrote my book.) Rhode offers amusing appearance-related comics, which I don’t. A final difference is that Rhode offers more details on the process by which legislation against appearance bias may be improved. This would be expected since Rhode is a law professor. While this segment of the book is a welcome addition, the conclusions reached on this matter are the same as delineated in my book: we need greater clarity of legal and other definitions of appearance bias and greater recognition of that bias. Overall, the conclusions reached and the solutions proffered are the same.

As social scientists, we are trained to adhere strongly to the principled search for scientific truths. I applaud all work that is well-founded, well-written, and distributed widely. The purpose of our work, scientifically and socially, is to advance understanding and to educate. It is also a maxim of all sciences that redundancies in research are unnecessary; the redundancies themselves negate the utility of the redundant work.

In sum, as scholars, one of our main tasks is to advance knowledge and to arrive at new discoveries. It is not our task to re-examine phenomena that has already been thoroughly examined and reported.

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