



# The Science of Beauty





# The Science of Beauty at a glance

"A gripping science report ... but also the story of a difficult love, which has enchanted and irritated humans since times unknown"



Ulrich Renz  
Schönheit.  
Eine Wissenschaft für sich  
320 pages, 50 figures  
€ 19,90 [D] / sFr 34,90  
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- ▷ The State of the Art in Attractiveness Research
- ▷ Thoroughly researched
- ▷ Thrillingly written

# Description



## About the author

Ulrich Renz was born in Stuttgart in 1960.

He has been working as a medical doctor and a publisher of medical and scientific literature. He is now a freelance writer.

In 2001 he published *Die Kunst, weniger zu arbeiten*, and in 2003 *Was ich mir wünsche, ist ein Clown*.

In 2005 he published the thriller for children *Auf der Spur der Erpresser*.

Beauty is a scandal. The beautiful baby is given more attention than a less attractive one, the pretty waitress earns a higher tip than her more homely colleague, the more attractive candidate gets a higher salary offer, the better looking politician more votes.

Why does beauty have so much power over us? How comes that beauty takes centre stage in our dreams, longings and fantasies? The world's biggest cosmetics company is worth three times as much as the world's biggest car manufacturer, General Motors. The media, movie and publishing industry make a living on nothing else than providing us with pictures of beautiful faces and bodies around the clock.

But: What is it that makes someone „beautiful“? Where in a face is that magic that attracts our gazes? Isn't beauty in the eye of the beholder?

Ulrich Renz takes us on an expedition into the world of attractiveness research. He makes us acquainted with evolutionary biologists performing glue-and-scissors-operations on the plumage of tropical birds, and neuroscientists peeping into the depth of the human brain in order to uncover the traces that a pretty face leaves in the brains of our fellow human beings.

The Science of Beauty is not only a fascinating report about one of the most challenging fields in modern science. It also takes issue with the compulsive fixation of our society on beauty and makes some suggestions for a more composed and self conscious way of dealing with beauty.



# Praise

"A fascinating book" (*Weltwoche*)

"It's really good. What makes it so worth reading is the artful way in which the author talks of science" (*Psychologie heute*)

Ulrich Renz shows the science of beauty ... in a most charming way"  
(*3sat Television, Wissenschaftsmagazin "nano"*)

"Almost as suspense-packed as a detective story" (*Ärzte Zeitung*)

"When Ulrich Renz explains science he uses imaginative and easily understandable images" (*NDR Info Radio*)

"A great book which is capable of changing the reader's image of his cospecifics and of himself profoundly"  
(*sandammer - Die virtuelle Literaturzeitschrift*)

"A cutting edge analysis" (*Deutschlandradio*)

"It's a must!" (*myself*)

"Entertaining and capturing" (*annabelle*)

"In an entertaining way Ulrich Renz confronts us with our obsession with beauty" (*Facts - Das Schweizer Nachrichtenmagazin*)

"Well written ... In a nutshell: a beautiful book" (*WDR radio*)

"A diverting book - you'll smile and appreciate it" (*Gehirn & Geist*)



# Contents

## Prologue A warning beforehand

(You can read and download the whole text at:  
[www.schoenheitsformel.de](http://www.schoenheitsformel.de) (in German only ...))

## Part I In Quest of the Formula of Beauty

### Chapter 1 In the eye of the beholder?

Sooner or later every discussion about beauty reaches the point where someone shouts out passionately : „But after all we all know that beauty is relative.“ The objection is not unjustified. Doesn't each civilization, each historical epoch, every single person have its own idea of beauty? On the other hand: If beauty was indeed only a matter of taste, why do top models earn such a tremendous amount of money? Perhaps our judgements of beauty do converge more than we want to admit. In search of an answer we take a look at the laboratories of attractiveness researchers and set out on a little journey through distant times and countries.



### Chapter 2 Beauty – only average?

By chance a 19<sup>th</sup> century British scientist found out that superimposing several faces on a photographic plate resulted in a especially attractive face. The rediscovery of his principle in our days marks the beginning of modern attractiveness research. But is beauty really only average? What other factors come into play? What does beauty have to do with having a baby face? What is the „certain something“ that makes an agreeable face a lovely one?



### Chapter 3 Beauty in the brain

Within a fraction of a second we „know“ if we find somebody beautiful or not. But how do we perceive beauty? What goes on in our brains, when we look at a pretty face or at an ugly one? Why of all things are the eyes so important? Is there something like a „beauty circuit“ in our brain?



## Chapter 4 How much fat does the formula of beauty contain?

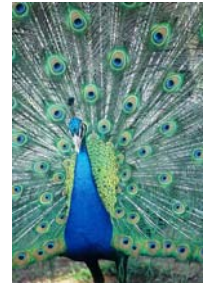
At the beginning of this chapter we set out for a journey through the centuries, where we meet the ideal bodies of the various epochs. How singular is our contemporary obsession with the super slim build? Why are a slim waistline and long legs sexy? How much does size matter? Is there an „optimal“ form of body curves?



## Part II Why beauty exists

### Chapter 5 Sex, lies, and instant glue

Why does beauty exist? The question already left Darwin puzzled. Didn't the peacock's fancy plumage blatantly contradict his theory of the „survival of the fittest“? How can a gaudy apparatus be an indicator of fitness if it makes the bird visible to predators and makes it slow to flee? The puzzle led Darwin to the principle of sexual selection, the „survival of the prettiest“. In order to be successful in evolution, an animal not only must survive, but also charm a partner. However – what is the message behind all that glitter? Is beauty an indicator of „good genes“, that is health and fertility? Or does the appearance feign something, that doesn't exist?



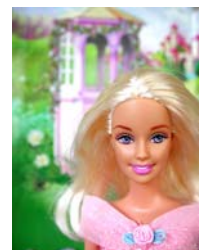
### Chapter 6 Sapiens - once more the exception?

This chapter deals with our memorable sex life. Where does our youth-mania come from? Why are men beauty addicts, whereas women are far less easily impressed by optical appearance? Which role does the menstrual cycle play in all this? Is it true that opposites attract one another? Why do women experience an orgasm more readily with a handsome partner? What role do the so called pheromones play in the mating game? Can we smell beauty in the end?



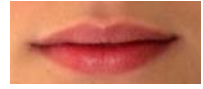
### Chapter 7 Beauty - only a prejudice?

This chapter is about how neuroscientists explain beauty. We come to know trained chickens that evaluate human faces, a swan madly in love with a pedal boat; an art-crazy neurologist – and what they all have to do with beauty.



## Chapter 8 Beautiful theories?

Does human beauty stand in a line with the plumage of the peacock or the croaking of the frog? Is it all about sex - like in the animal kingdom - or does human beauty convey a broader message? Is beauty male or female?



## Part III Beautiful and good

### Chapter 9 Fortune favours the pretty

When meeting a stranger, we construct a mental picture of him in no time. But in doing so something strange happens: the prettier the person, the better the characteristics we attribute to him or her. And we treat him or her accordingly. Pretty babies, already, receive more attention than less seducing ones, even from their own mothers; later on they get more affection in preschool, better marks at school, and this preferential treatment continues on and on...



### Chapter 10 Capitalism of beauty

In this chapter we scrutinize the class rule of beauty. What difference does an attractive appearance make for your career? And how does this translate into hard cash? Do men or women capitalize more on their looks? And: What role does appearance play in politics? Does the Irak war have something to do with beauty?



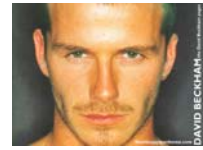
### Chapter 11 Self-deception as a program?

Already in our fairy tales and myths the good ones are beautiful and the ugly ones mean. But how did the good enter the formula of beauty? Have we been born with this paradoxical program? Have we taken over the stereotype from our parents? From the media? Does it make any evolutionary sense? Can one do anything against this annoying reflex? Do we need a new kind of affirmative action to protect those less favoured by nature?



## Chapter 12 Pretty, smart and happy?

With all the preferential treatment they receive – couldn't it be true after all, that the beautiful are *really* better than the normally looking? As a matter of fact, beautiful children are clearly more intelligent than less beautiful ones ... Do the beautiful excel in other fields as well? Does beauty make for happiness?



## Chapter 13 Beauty, love and prostitution

What does beauty have to do with love? What role does one's beauty-capital play on the partner market? In the game of supply and demand a man can, besides his outward appearance, bring his status to bear, whereas the women must rely entirely on her beauty. In an essayistic excursion the author asks the heretic question, where exactly in the bartering of „beauty“ for „status“ runs the border to prostitution.



## Part IV And deliver us from beauty?

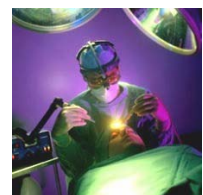
### Chapter 14 Extension of the problem zones

Never ever in history of mankind people had so much beauty to look at. From each billboard the most beautiful exemplars of our species, half naked and in king-size, give us a smile. Ever more desperately we work on ourselves in order to meet ever rising standards of beauty. But the harder we try, the more dissatisfied we are with our bodies. Is the permanent presence of beauty responsible for the rising tide of social isolation?



### Chapter 15 Beauty in times of its feasibility

The growth rates on the market for beauty enhancement technologies suggest that in the future a well-kept appearance will be what used to be the state of the teeth: an attribute of class. A straight nose, the absence of tear sacs and other stigmata: a mere question of buying power? What is the future of our beautymania?



### Chapter 16 How to cope with beauty

We have subscribed to eternal youth and thus engaged in a fight we cannot win. We are at the point of making ourselves unhappy with beauty, which in reality is nothing else than a promise of happiness. Is there a way out of the arms race? This chapter makes some suggestions for a more composed and self conscious way of dealing with beauty.





# Foreign Rights Status

Spanish edition: Grupo Planeta (in preparation)

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