



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Cosmetics, Fashion and the Exploitation of Women*. by Joseph Hansen and Evelyn Reed

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lower-class whites are more responsible for the problems of blacks than middle- and upper-class whites. In education, researchers often blame poor teachers but not poor superintendents for the problems of inner-city blacks.

This critical review leads Payne to suggest that researchers have been asking the wrong question about the educational problems of inner-city blacks, namely, "Why low-income students do not learn." They frame the question this way probably because they assume that there is an educational profession out there making a credible effort at teaching the children. But apparently that is not the case. And Payne proceeds to demonstrate this from the Westside school study.

In two chapters following the review of the competing theories, Payne describes his study and the major findings. As would be expected, he focuses on the process of schooling, not on characteristics of the children. He admits, however, that he includes elements from the theories he criticizes. For example, he includes "a version of the RAP thesis" because he looks only at how classrooms vary, "which precludes looking at the central influence of institutional will" (p. 72).

From observations and student interviews, Payne found that Westside "teachers and students and administrators give exactly what they are asked to give" (p. 73): The students do not work hard because the teachers do not demand that they do; and teachers do not take teaching seriously because the administration does not demand that they do. The author sums up by saying that "In the end it may well be that one of the most significant differences between Westside students and others is that students at Westside are far less likely to meet someone who will insist that they do what they can" (pp. 100-101). He then suggests that the solution may lie in a kind of "effective school" model of teaching and learning. And researchers' responsibility lies in studying what works. The author balances his emphasis on lack of demand as the cause of poor performance with his discussion of the role of students as accomplices in their own miseducation (p. 117).

I have questions about two issues. One is the lack of clear distinction between research directed at explaining the causes of school failure and research directed at discovering appropriate treatment of the problem (pp. 104 ff). One may ask why inner-city black children are not learning; one may also ask what makes or can make inner-city black children learn. The answers to one are not necessarily the answers for the other. That some remedies "work" does not necessarily mean that their absence was the cause of the prior condition. The other question has to do with the degree to which "within-

school factors" account for the learning and nonlearning of inner-city black children. Some studies suggest that, at least during the adolescent period, some nonschool factors like social identity and cultural frame of reference play an important role (see Fordham and Ogbu 1986).

On the whole this is an important and well-written book which researchers, policy makers, and practitioners will find useful. It clarifies many conceptual issues and demonstrates how the study of the process of schooling avoids the pitfalls of conventional research, and it enriches our understanding of what makes or can make inner-city black students succeed.

Cosmetics, Fashion and the Exploitation of Women, by JOSEPH HANSEN and EVELYN REED. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1986. 144 pages. \$15.00 cloth. \$4.94 paper.

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The pointed breasts, stiletto heels, and wasp waists of the New Look signaled the onset of the Cold War and the feminine mystique, just as blue jeans, afros, and long hair marked the rebellion of the 1960s: style is a weathervane of the political climate. Silks, furs, jewels, and *alta moda* make style a visible sign of social class. Facial scarification, skull-binding, lip disks, corsets, and anorexic slimness remind us that style is artifice, exaggeration, and even deformity, and that cultural ideals are often far removed from any "natural" beauty and good taste. In capitalist society, fashion has become a major industry, and rapid fashion changes are an essential element in the realization of profit by the economy's consumer sector.

This volume is a lively but relatively superficial exploration of these themes within a Marxist framework. It is a collection of letters and articles from the *Militant*, the weekly newspaper of the Trotskyite-oriented Socialist Workers Party; most of the material dates from the mid-1950s. The debate began with a short article by Jack Bustelo (Joseph Hansen) contending that the cosmetics industry exploits women by persuading them to buy foolish, needless products. Readers objected, expressing the following types of arguments: Women want cosmetics and elegant clothes as part of the universal—and surely not pernicious—desire to look attractive; cosmetics introduce an element of fun and pleasure into otherwise drab working-class lives; the use of cosmetics has unfortunately become a necessity for women trying to improve their chances in the labor market. The longest of these letters is by

Marjorie McGowan, who argues that bourgeois standards of beauty and elegance are part of the rational kernel of the capitalist social order that can be preserved, enhanced, and made accessible to all under socialism. Evelyn Reed and Jack Bustelo reply in two essays in which they suggest that class society and especially capitalist commodity production have carried the use of fashion and cosmetics far beyond any reasonable measure, and have inextricably connected it to alienated social relationships.

This debate is as lively and relevant in the 1980s as it was in 1954, for the obsession with style has been expanded to men, to ever younger age groups, and to newly rich social strata. The scholarly reader may, however, want a more systematic analysis of either the fashion industry or the symbolic mechanisms by which fashion acquires such a powerful hold on the public. The debate presented here can serve as a stimulus to a deeper examination of fashion in capitalist society, whose outlines might be found in the works of Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt School.

The volume ends with another debate between McGowan and Reed, this one on the origins of women's oppression. I find McGowan's account to be a better reconciliation of modern anthropological findings with Engels' general theoretical orientation. By insisting on matriarchy as a cornerstone of a Marxist theory of the family (and equating the matriarchal period with primitive communism), Reed places the whole edifice of Engels' analysis on a shaky basis. We do not have to accept Engels' nineteenth-century ethnographic sources so literally; the general framework of Marxist analysis is not at all damaged by an inclusion of more recent empirical materials.

The collection begins with an essay by Mary-Alice Waters in which she summarizes current efforts to reverse or compartmentalize the gains of the women's movement; she also introduces the debates, taking Reed's side against McGowan in both instances.

Taken for what it is (i.e., a collection of thirty-year-old newspaper items), the volume is thought-provoking, although probably of limited value for scholarly or pedagogic purposes.

Mirror, Mirror . . . The Importance of Looks in Everyday Life, by ELAINE HATFIELD and SUSAN SPRECHER. Albany: SUNY Press, 1986. 446 pp. NPL cloth.

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Here is a good review of the expanding literature on physical attractiveness, written in a

simple instructive style, with lots of tests for self-analysis. This text will appeal to undergraduates who are fascinated by their looks, enabling them to compare their own experiences with research findings in the book.

Covering much the same ground as Gordon Patzer's more sophisticated but drier book, *The Physical Attractiveness Phenomena* (1985), the main theme in both is that a pervasive halo effect surrounds beautiful people. We assume them to have all sorts of additional favorable attributes (although we also think them vain and adulterous), while ugly people are considered to be deficient on these other attributes.

Overall, the scientific findings confirm commonsense notions about beauty and ugliness. We are nicer to good-looking than to plain-looking people, we desire them more as sex objects, give them more sexual opportunities, higher grades, better jobs, and so on. Conversely, ugly people suffer.

Occasional research results are unexpected. Thus, while it is common knowledge that people tend to marry others of similar attractiveness, I was surprised to read that couples matched on physical attractiveness had more successful marriages than did unmatched couples (p. 149). While I always assumed life to be pleasanter for the pretty than for the homely, I would not have guessed that homeliness predicts mental illness (pp. 263–68). Findings like these—if they hold up—will make physical attractiveness a primary variable in social psychology.

Is it better to be beautiful? Yes, although the authors argue in their final chapters that looks are not *that* important. (I wasn't convinced, after reading all that had come before.)

The first author, Elaine Hatfield (Walster), is a major contributor to the new research on physical attractiveness. She and Susan Sprecher have written an authoritative review of their field as it stands today. Nonetheless, I would contest them on two points, the first being their denial of any universal standard of physical beauty (pp. 4–12). Donald Symons, in *The Evolution of Human Sexuality* (1979), and others have made a strong case that across cultures and epochs, men are reliably attracted to the secondary sexual characteristics of young women, not only breasts and hips but general roundness rather than angularity, fleshiness rather than flaccidity, unblemished and smooth rather than saggy skin, and symmetry.

Second, Hatfield and Sprecher, noting real personality and behavioral differences that separate attractive from unattractive people, explain these as the result of self-fulfilling prophecy: beautiful and ugly people accept the social stereotypes about themselves and act accordingly, producing, for example, beauties who are vivacious and uglies who are bashful.