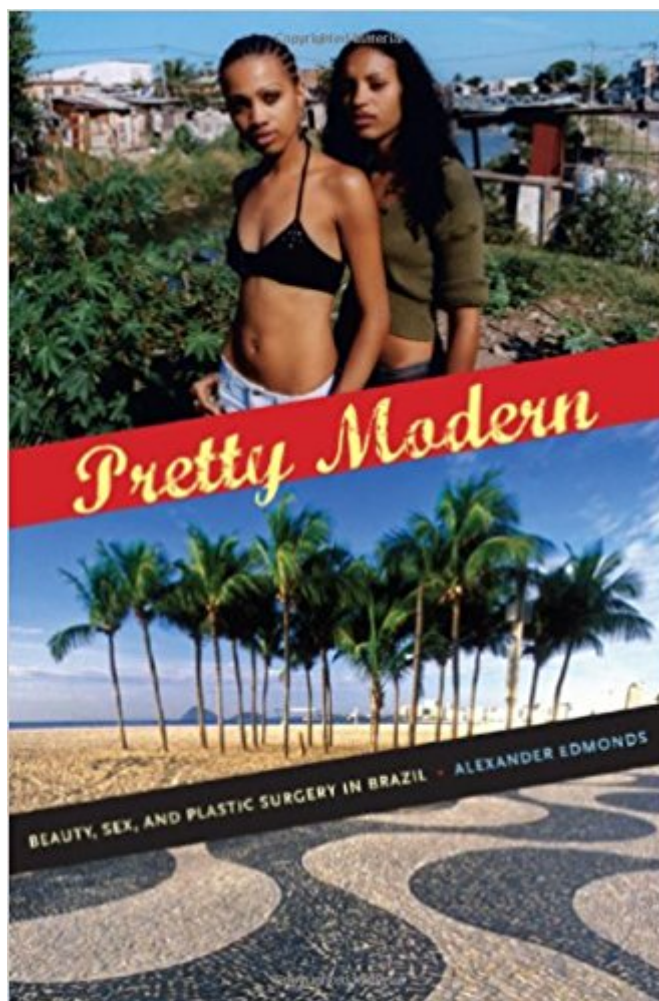


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# Pretty Modern: Beauty, Sex, And Plastic Surgery In Brazil



## Synopsis

Pretty Modern is a riveting account of Brazil's emergence as a global leader in plastic surgery. Intrigued by a Carnaval parade that mysteriously paid homage to a Rio de Janeiro plastic surgeon, anthropologist Alexander Edmonds conducted research that took him from Ipanema socialite circles to glitzy telenovela studios to the packed waiting rooms of public hospitals offering free cosmetic surgery. The result is provocative exploration of the erotic, commercial, and intimate aspects of beauty in a nation with extremes of wealth and poverty and a reputation for natural sensuality. Drawing on conversations with maids and their elite mistresses, divorced housewives, black celebrities, and favela residents aspiring to be fashion models, Edmonds analyzes what sexual desirability means and does for women in different social positions. He argues that beauty is a distinct realm of modern experience that does not simply reflect other inequalities. It mimics the ambiguous emancipatory potential of capital, challenging traditional hierarchies while luring consumers into a sexual culture that reduces the body to the brute biological criteria of attractiveness. Illustrated with color photographs, Pretty Modern offers a fresh theoretical perspective on the significance of female beauty in consumer capitalism.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A fresh, smart, insightful, entertaining, and compelling book about a topic •cosmetic surgery• that many of us thought had self-combusted in the 1990s amid irresolvable debates about whether women who wanted bigger breasts were subjects with agency or duped victims of the beauty myth. Pretty Modern rises from the ashes of those debates to

provide us with exciting new ways of thinking about what plastic surgery is, what it means, and what it does. It is first-rate anthropology and a wonderfully perceptive study of

Brazil. *Don Kulick, author of *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes** "A masterpiece. *Pretty Modern* is one of the most nuanced and beautifully crafted ethnographies out there. *João Biehl, author of *Will to Live: AIDS Therapies and the Politics of Survival** "Alexander Edmonds provides readers with a compelling and visceral ethnography about the ubiquitous cultural practice of *plastica*, or cosmetic surgery, in Rio to better understand its ubiquity across Brazil's different social classes. . . . *Pretty Modern* is an important contribution to the literature on gender and the body, and will be of interest to Brazil specialists and nonspecialists alike. Although the focus is beauty, those considering race or history will also find the material useful. (Lesley N. Braun *Visual Anthropology Review*) "Fascinating. . . . The book overflows with provocative discussions. . . . [T]his study should evoke reflection and animated discussion of medicine, gender, self, culture, and modernity in multiple academic settings and beyond. Recommended. All levels/libraries. (G. W. McDonogh *Choice*) "Pretty Modern is a provocative ethnographic excursion through the labyrinth of context necessary for understanding the rise in popularity of cosmetic plastic surgery in contemporary Brazil. I found his ethnography to be important and compelling. (Donna Goldstein *American Ethnologist*) "Pretty Modern presents a wealth of ethnographic data, weaving together thick descriptions of hospital waiting rooms, television studios, and everyday conversations, illustrated with images of advertisements and frank portraits of Edmonds's informants. (Ashley Mears *e-misferica*) "Alex Edmonds's book *Pretty Modern* is a remarkable account of cosmetic surgery or plastic in Brazil. One of the huge strengths of Edmonds's book is the detail and complexity he brings to each of the issues he analyses. [I]t is ultimately refreshing. (Ruth Holliday *Sociology of Health and Illness*) "One of the clear advantages of *Pretty Modern* is the great depth of analysis that we are offered. Anecdotes and detailed descriptions provide the backdrop for theoretical discussions, fleshing out the arguments and providing the reader with a more rounded view of the issues. *Pretty Modern* is a very enjoyable, provocative and stimulating read. (Aoife McKenna *Medical Sociology Online*) "Edmonds offers readers a provocative, richly textured, and nuanced analysis of the rise in popularity of *plástica* across social classes in Brazil. . . . *Pretty Modern* is a masterful ethnography about the medicalization of beauty. (Hilda Lloréns *Anthropological Quarterly*) "Highly readable and ranging from

ethnographic, to historical, to theoretical, *Pretty Modern* will appeal to a broad readership. (Susan Besse Luso-Brazilian Review)

"A fresh, smart, insightful, entertaining, and compelling book about a topic--cosmetic surgery--that many of us thought had self-combusted in the 1990s amid irresolvable debates about whether women who wanted bigger breasts were subjects with agency or duped victims of the 'beauty myth.' *Pretty Modern*" rises from the ashes of those debates to provide us with exciting new ways of thinking about what plastic surgery is, what it means, and what it does. It is first-rate anthropology and a wonderfully perceptive study of Brazil."--Don Kulick, author of *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*

Required reading for school - very interesting

As a plastic surgeon practising in India , I had heard about the plastic surgery craze in Brazil. I was curious to know how a not so rich country like Brazil had so much demand for plastic surgery . Naturally I was glad to find this book and I did get my answers. This books is rather dull at places -but overall does justice to the subject.

In *Pretty Modern*, Edmonds gives the history of plastic surgery in Brazil and talks about the cultural factors that have made Brazil the plastic surgery capital of the world. Edmonds explains that the large gaps in socioeconomic status and the fact that a middle class is virtually nonexistent has led many to seek out plastic surgery as a means to increase their capital. Edmonds argues that beauty and capital in Brazil are directly proportional. He supports this claim with several interesting examples of cosmetic procedures relating to race like the correction of the negroid nose. Edmonds also touches on the fact that race is quite complicated in Brazil. For instance, many Brazilians describe themselves as being *morena* when a typical American would describe them as being black. According to Edmonds, many Brazilians identify as being *morena* because being black in Brazil really lowers ones chances of success. This explains why correction of the negroid nose remains a popular type of cosmetic surgery. Edmonds presents the psychological reasons for cosmetic surgery as well. A common excuse that plastic surgeons use to perform cosmetic surgery relates to the self-esteem of the patient. Doctors argue that if a physical defect is corrected, then the patient's self esteem will increase and they will go on to live a happier life. Edmonds gives several examples of women that have had plastic surgery and support this approach to cosmetic surgery,

especially women who have had plastic surgery to return their bodies to the state before childbirth. The analysis that Edmonds presents in *Pretty Modern* is strong, and the examples of plastic surgery that he includes are both interesting and entertaining. The dialogue alone of Edmond's informants will keep most readers entertained. Edmond's argument is easy to follow, and I would recommend this ethnography to anyone who finds the topic of plastic surgery interesting or to anyone who just wants a fun read.

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