

**There's a 10
coming 'round
the corner!**

**Your On the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

The Ugly Factor

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The Ugly Factor

Report One: Demise of Beauty Contests

April 12, 2006

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. It's been raining in Northern Idaho every day for the past several weeks. Therefore, I'm not on the streets much. From my armchair, I wish to report that I have encountered two more persons of color during these past two months up here in the Idaho panhandle (one black, the other brown). If you wish, you can update your Persons of Color tables. (Available in the report, "Here Comes the Neighborhood (II)," published in the series *Immigration and Emigration* and available at Blog.UylessBlack.com).

Before I hit the streets again, here are some musings I made recently from inside my dry home. Yesterday, I read an article on the topic of ugly people.¹ This subject is of keen interest to all of us because we know ugly people are *visually impaired*.² I don't mean ugly people can't see well. Rather, ugly people are not all that pleasant to view---to look at, so-to-speak. They impair *our* vision. We humans have a deeply seeded bias against viewing ugly people, a disposition I have coined the Visually Impaired Syndrome (VIS).

Unfortunately for ugly people, they must go through their life with a VIS handicap. During this journey, they are more likely to be bypassed in job promotions. They will not snare the attractive mate. They seldom appear in lead roles in anything of consequence. Try as they may, they cannot change what they see in the mirror. Morning, noon, or night their glances into the reflecting glass convey the same image and message: They're a low number on the 1-10 beauty scale. I know their plight. I am one of them. I feel my pain, and upon glances into the mirror, I also look at it.

Entitlements, Good Looks, and Looking Good

Because of the negative consequences of sporting less than a Bo Derek image, the feel-good/look-good elements in our society---championed by the Equal Outcome Commission (EOC)---are lobbying for our government to declare all people who are below a 3 on the beauty scale to be declared as legally handicapped. According to the Everyone Is Equal (EIE) lobby and the Equal Outcome Commission, these citizens should be granted entitlements such as free plastic surgery.

More entitlements? America is spending itself into insolvency by its profligate mismanagement of Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security. In addition, fifteen percent of Americans are on the Food Stamp program. Think about that fact. Fifteen percent of the population runs to about 47 million people. Food stamps pay \$133 for groceries per month for a family. The biggest surprise I had in my stint at the Dallas Federal Reserve Bank was seeing the space consumed in the bank vaults for Food Stamp certificates. They took up more room than the greenbacks.

¹ "Primary Sources," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 2006, 53, based on a study, Naci Mocan and Erdal Terkin, "Ugly Criminals," National Bureau of Economic Research. Also, I'll pen this piece with the assumption that ugly people are not reading it. They live next door, across the street, or down the block. For myself, I'll continue harboring wishful illusions each time I look into a mirror.

² By the way, I count myself as part of this population. Consequently, consider this expose to be written by an insider.

Nonetheless, a nation that is worth anything takes care of its less fortunate. As well, it has “tough love” programs that get people back into the working society. America needs more of these programs, but our so-called capitalistic way of life makes a modern day WPA politically incorrect. Currently, 47 major assistance programs exist to get people back on their feet. Nine agencies administer them, often on a redundant basis. Nonetheless, the richest country on earth spends 1/6 the amount that the Nordic countries spend on retraining citizens.

But then America is populated by a rugged bunch of capitalists. And those Nordics are pandering socialists...who are eating our lunch in building and sustaining a fair and productive society.

Sticking to the theme of this report, these situations in America are becoming alarmingly *ugly* (there you go). Scores of warnings (and practical, fair solutions) are available for an interested reader. Please see the footnote for a couple of fine references.³ For now, I return to lighter fare about the subject of human ugliness.

Early Efforts to Combat the Ugly Factor

To prepare this article, I conducted research on facial surgery. I discovered that many years ago, in some ancient societies, a person’s nose could be amputated as a form of punishment for a crime.⁴ This alteration to the person’s face had a significant impact on the person’s looks---a significant contribution to their Ugly Factor (UF).

Of course, few of those ancient people looked forward to being in the company of a noseless person, not too different from our views today. So, the Visually Impaired Syndrome came into play in this situation. Fortunately for all---the nose-impaired as well as the nose-endowed---the potters’ caste (medieval “plastic surgeons”) developed a method to rebuild the nose by using part of the forehead of the noseless person.⁵ The problem was not entirely solved because the person now had a nose, but no forehead. But such were the tradeoffs of surgery in those early times.

Removing the Ugly Factor and the Visually Impaired Syndrome

Speaking as a Jeffersonian-minimal-government citizen, I’m not in favor of government-sponsored plastic surgery for ugly people. I don’t want the government assisting me or anyone else in saving face. Here’s why:⁶

Scores of millions of people in the United States undergo various forms of plastic surgery procedures. Common operations entail reshaping the nose, lips, ears, and breasts, and removing wrinkles from all parts of the face. Another popular surgery is cutting away excess flesh around the chin and neck and a related procedure called liposculpture, which removes excess fat deposits from various areas of the body.

³ Peter G. Peterson, *Running on Empty* (New York: Picador Press, 2004), <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/jun/19/us-commerce-sounds-alarm-over-entitlement-spending/>.

⁴ “Plastic Surgery,” Microsoft Encarta Reference Library.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Some of my readers may recognize parts of this essay from my earlier writings. I have used the Bell Shaped Curve for Attractiveness before but with a different theme. I trust you will allow me some plagiarism of my own material. I have obtained proper copyright permission.

These operations make for better looking people, a laudable trait leading to sexual attraction and the propagation of our species. After all, it is well known that physical attraction is important in sexual relations. Just consider your own libido: What is the ratio in incidents of your *lust* after an ugly person in comparison to a beautiful person? All right, you don't lust. Jimmy Carter does the lusting, but you remain above the fray. I did not mean to demean your super moral persona. So, I'll use myself as the model for comparison. I do not lust! I only admire. That said, I restate the question: What is the ratio in incidents of your *admiring* the looks of ugly person in comparison to a beautiful person?

I can't wait Until tomorrow, because I get better looking each day

Here is the problem with the Equal Outcome Commission plastic surgery idea. Unlike Narcissus, we humans are never satisfied with our looks. For example, after a man has his nose reshaped, thus becoming more attractive, he moves to the right side of the Bell Shaped Curve for Attractiveness (The "Good Looking People" position in Figure 1). Shortly thereafter, he decides he needs to pin back his ears---in order to move farther to the right side of the Curve and look even better. Next, his eyes need some work, then the chin, next the lips and so on---until he is a candidate for the cover of a glamour magazine.

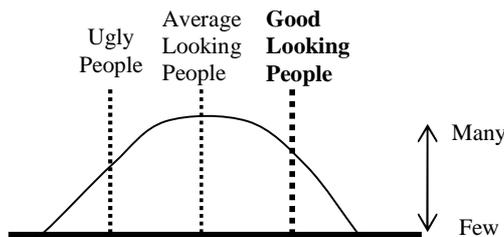


Figure 1. Bell shaped curve for attractiveness.

One would think this approach is simple, straight-forward, and effective. To some, it is. But many members of our race are also motivated to move their Ugly/Beauty Index (UBI) to the right side of the Curve, which results in the general population skewing the Curve, as shown in Figure 2.

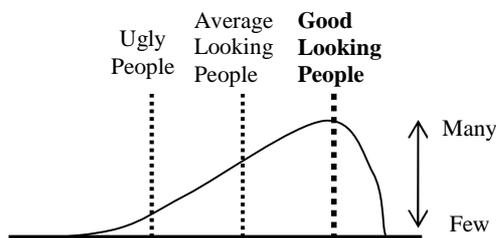


Figure 2. The new Bell Shaped Curve for attractiveness.

Why is this approach a problem? After all, more people are looking better, which makes for more pleasant looking experiences for those doing the looking. So, the Visually Impaired Syndrome becomes less a factor in our everyday life.

But it does not turn out this way. As more people begin to look like one another, it becomes impossible to appreciate natural beauty, leading to the demise of beauty contests. All entries are equally beautiful, and everyone ties for first place.⁷ And that, my friends, is the heart of the problem. What would America be without beauty contests?

Can you imagine our having to judge a person on something other than looks? My first impressions of a person are visual because I usually see them before I hear them. In less than a second, I have formed an opinion about this person based on his or her appearance. These initial impressions are stored in my mind. Try as I do, they remain there. In spite of my growing admiration for their fine mind, I can't cast off my original impression of their Cro-Magnon profile.

Returning to the plastic surgery problem, as more people move to the right side of the curve as shown in the previous figure, the effect is the creation of a new Bell Shaped Curve, shown in Figure 3. The end result? The good-looking person, now in an altered population of beautiful people will once again be judged as being average-looking; or even worse, below-average-looking.

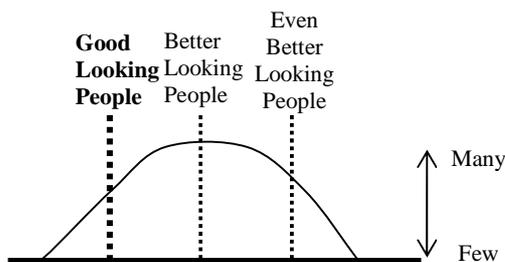


Figure 3. The revised curve.

Plastic surgery is becoming as common as a visit to the dentist. Consequently, we are now caught-up in a never-ending problem: Try as we will, we are destined to be average looking...or worse.

⁷ Watching the movie stars at the Oscars presentation has become an exercise of guessing who the person actually is. He or she faintly resembles his or her former self.

The Ugly Factor

Report Two: Ugly People Commit Ugly Crimes

April 13, 2006

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. In the first segment of this report, I stated we humans have a bias against ugly people, which I named the Visually Impaired Syndrome (VIS). I added that ugly people have the unfortunate task of going though life with the VIS handicap. By the way, to protect myself from lawsuits and picket lines from the Ugly People Lobby, I have come out of the ugly people closet. I'm a born-again ugly person.

Here is more bad news for ugly people: The researchers claim there is a significant correlation between ugliness and crime:⁸

(A study revealed) that as a person's reported attractiveness decreases, the chance of his or her having committed a crime---from selling drugs to burglary---goes up.

Talk about a handicap. If you are not on the right-most side of the Bell Shaped Curve of Attractiveness, you are more prone to a life of legal misdeeds than the hunk or hunkee living next door. And the situation is worse than this quote suggests. That is, worse, if one is ugly. For example, this study contends good-looking high school girls have higher grades and fewer disciplinary problems than unattractive high school girls. And when a Bo Derek type 10 female does break the law, she is less likely to be detained than a female who is rated lower on the scale.

Who knows where these findings will lead in our coddled society? Maybe someday, high school cheerleaders will be required to be ugly. I hope not. If so, I might be inclined to watch the ball game.

The Equal Outcome Commission (EOC) to the Rescue

In spite of the bad news for the uglies, we can take heart because the EOC will lobby for changes in our society. For example, after the look-good/feel-good folks have their way, a plausible, legal defense for breaking the law will be insanity, a bad childhood, bad breath, or being ugly: "Your honor, I'm not responsible for axing my wife. My face made me do it."

On the surface, the notion is silly. But consider some of the trials in American courts today: Effective legal defenses for a lawbreaker include personal attributes about which the lawbreaker has (*seemingly*) no control: Poverty, mate abuse, bad childhood, misfiring synapses in the brain, lack of employment opportunities, inebriation. What's next? A child shoots his parents because he is forced to wear Walmart shoes instead of Air Jordon's?

We are doing satire here, so let's pose a scenario to make a point: If one can't control one's facial tics and---let's say---one's acne, and if facial tics and acne lead to crime, how can a judge incarcerate a facially-ticed, acne-scared axe killer?

⁸ Naci Mocan and Erdal Terkin, "Ugly Criminals," National Bureau of Economic Research. The study included 15,000 people between the ages of 18 – 26. They were rated of an attractiveness scale of 1 – 5. I prefer a scale of 1-10, but then I'm a traditionalist.

Answer: In our coddled society, the judge sentences the axe killer to plastic surgery. You think I'm over the top? Maybe. But look at recent court rulings about who or what is to blame for the most recent axe murder or child rape. See the list above, and add even more excuses as we transmogrify into a landscape of blameless human flora and fauna...but attractive flora and fauna.

You're welcome, and I'll take my Pulitzer with a bit of pilsner and a spot of plastic surgery.

The Ugly Factor Report Three: Top Forty Unsexiest Men

April 14, 2006

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. As you know, our current reports are dealing with people who are less than 10 on a 1-10 attractiveness scale. Much less than 10. Say a 1, 2, or 3. For those readers who have forgotten the subject, Figure 4 will refresh your memory.

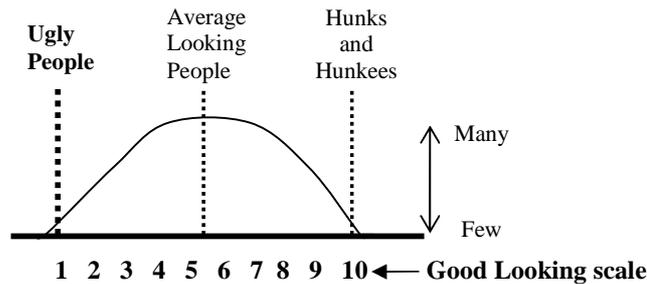


Figure 4. The Bell Shaped Curve of looks.

Where Have I Been?

During my research on this subject, a Web site provided a list of the “Top 40 Unsexiest Men.” (See the list on the next page.) I read the names on this list and circled those I recognized.⁹ I circled only 16 names. I suspect my celebrity IQ borders on imbecility. For many years, I read mostly geek journals. (But not always. I once picked-up *Foreign Affairs*---thinking its title meant something other than what it meant and maybe an opportunity to check out some 10s.)

My son is amazed at my culture gaps. He often asks for feedback when he mentions a famous name to me, “Dad, are sure you know this guy?” His counseling helps my keeping-up with the *People* magazine world. Thanks to my son, I read the headlines of the tabloids as I stand in the line at the grocery store.

How many of the names on the list does an average citizen in America know? If typical citizens circle most of them, I would wager they buy the tabloids displayed at the grocery store check-out lines. Alternately, they watch a lot of “Entertainment Tonight” shows. No offence intended. I envy their couch potato acumen. I wish I had more of it. During social occasions in which the assemblage is bantering, I am at a loss of how to response to, “Wow, that concert last week. What do you think about [people on the cover of *People*] leaving the building together?”

This Web site also informed me that Brad Pitt is on the list of Top 100 Unsexiest Men because of rumors he has “hygiene” problems. Poor Angelina.

⁹ Fearful that I might be sued for highlighting ugly people, I have omitted the circles I made on this table.

A Blink and a Glance

In his book *Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell (who is on the list) describes many instances in which humans form impressions and execute associated responses in a fraction of a second.¹⁰ In some situations, we act before we are aware we are acting. This characteristic is a trait for surviving, which evolved during earlier times when we were not yet earth’s dominant predator.

Top 40 Unsexiest Men¹¹

1. Gilbert Gottfried	21. Ron Howard
2. Randy Johnson	22. Clint Howard
3. Roger Ebert	23. Bill Gates
4. Dr. Phil	24. Paul Shaffer
5. Alan Clomes	25. Axl Rose
6. Chad Kroeger	26. Tim Burton
7. Mike Mills	27. Edward James Olmos
8. Osama Bin Laden	28. Gerard Way
9. Jay Leno	29. Don Zimmer
10 Don Immus	30. Tony Kornseiser
11. Michael Jackson	31. Chris Kattan
12. Wallace Shawn	32. Otis Nixon
13. Mike D.	33. Julian Tavaréz
14. Richard Simmons	34. Christopher Lloyd
15. Jon Lovitz	35. Willie McGee
16. Carrot Top	36. Pat Cummings
17. Jerry Seinfeld	37. Scottie Pippen
18. Malcom Gladwell	38. Larry David
19. Chevy Chase	39. Michael Moore
20. Raffi	40. Al Franken

Mr. Gladwell also describes a decision-making apparatus called the *adaptive unconscious*, which is our ability to quickly process a lot of visual, aural, olfactory, and sensory information. The adaptive unconscious often keeps us out of harm’s way. As examples, we move our hand away from a hot stove before we think of moving our hand. We unconsciously jump away from an approaching car. We turn our head away from a gust of cold wind or a whiff of bad breath---all before we realize what we did.

We unconsciously shun ugly people. But why? Do we shy away from the 1s of this world because they may be dangerous? Do we avoid them because they imply we might fit into their position on the Bell Shaped Curve of Ugliness? I don’t know the answers to these questions, but I do know I do not approach a ugly-looking individual on the street to ask for directions. I wait for a person sporting an acceptable countenance. I admit I have harbored a long-held prejudice against the folks who have had the unfortunate fate of their DNA placing themselves on the left side of the Bell Shaped Curve for Good Looks. It’s a bit unsettling, as I have a prejudice against myself.

Like you (I would wager), I make scores of decisions each day based on my adaptive unconscious. And yet, after reading Mr. Gladwell’s book, I began to wonder if these initial

¹⁰ Malcolm, Gladwell, *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking* (New York, Little, Brown, 2005).

¹¹ AOL Web Page, April 18, 2006.

impressions are valid. Truth is, I don't know if they are valid or not, because I don't know how to second guess impressions that have already settled into my brain. And that is the problem with bias and prejudice: How do we dislodge that which is fixed in our gray matter? It is not an easy task.

I usually say to myself, "I was not wrong about that person." It is rare when I say to myself, "I was wrong about that person." It does happen but not often. This aspect of human behavior is one almost all humans refuse to acknowledge. Once we wire our brains into modes of action and thought, it is very difficult to change our beliefs and behavior. Habits really do die hard.

First impressions often manifest themselves because of the biases and prejudices just mentioned. Mr. Gladwell cites a number of examples in his book, and he confesses he is disturbed to learn his seemingly unprejudiced mind is indeed imbued with bias. Not me, I was pulling your chain earlier. I have no prejudices. I'm perfect. And I wager most readers of this report think the same as I. Still, try some of the tests in his book. They may surprise you.

Beards: They Turn You On, or They Turn You Off

Here is a case study about first impressions and biases. This story took place before I was married...so-stated to keep my marital status in the present tense. I was living in the Washington, DC area, a recent transplant from almost three years in Asia.

A single buddy and his girl friend decided to fix me up with this girl's neighbor. Fine with me, female-wise, my plate was empty. They brought me over to the girlfriend's home to make the introductions. In no uncertain terms, she let my "first impressions" know she was not interested in me. Before I said "Hello," her body language and her facial expressions declared, "Jesus, what a loser! Why am I standing in this doorway trying to be nice to an ugly person?" I felt my pain.

She was a near 10, thus emitting sufficient stimuli to excite certain aspects of my adaptive unconscious. But no dice. I was on the left side of the Bell Shaped Curve for Ugliness. I left her doorstep immediately---in search of something else for my plate.

On the way back to my empty lair, my friend told me the woman was turned-off because of my beard. That was it. My facial hair repulsed her. My lion-like mane had, one grown to attract a lioness, had come to naught.

A year or so later, I ran into this woman at a party. I had shaved my beard. She fell for me. I fell for her. With impressions of mutual 10s toward each other, we had a passionate affair. Confident in a newly-found member of my lair, I started growing another beard. Her ardor and passion for me declined in direct proportion to the length of the hair on my face.

What did this mean? Maybe it was just another example of how deceiving first impressions can be. It turned out, that *sans* a beard, she thought I was pretty cool. Anyway, eventually this sexual sage had a happy ending. I won her over with my personality...but not with a beard.

It's Not Your Clothes You Dummy. It's Your Face!

During the early 1960s, I was spending the night in Kyoto, Japan, waiting for a train to take me to Tokyo. It was late evening, and I decided to leave my hotel for a nightcap. Several blocks from the hotel, I turned off a main street to enter a nightclub that was somewhat hidden from the main through-fare. Its entrance was guarded by two men. As I approached them, I detected looks of unhappiness on their faces. One of the men stepped toward me and said, "No whites!"

My adaptive unconscious blurted out, "Whites! What's wrong with you? I'm in civilian clothes." I thought the man was not pleased I was wearing (which I was *not* wearing) a U.S. Navy service dress *white* uniform. I made a snap decision that he was speaking of clothes that I did not have on. He was referring to my skin color. How dull-witted could I be? First impressions are often incorrect. In non-emergency situations, we should just pause a bit before acting.

Phil Rizutto's Mitt is too Big. Do You Have Tiny Tim's Glove?

When I was a lad, two midgets came to visit my stepmother. She did not tell me they were midgets. She just mentioned that four friends were passing through town and were dropping-by to say hello. Before long, they arrived at our doorstep and came into our living room. I beheld what I thought were two parents and two children: a boy and a girl.

The "boy" and "girl" were midgets, but their skeletons and muscles were scaled like non-midgets. They displayed no midget-like appendages. I thought they were kids, just like me. And being a gregarious sort of child, I immediately invited the "boy" to my room to take a look at my new baseball glove.

The glove was my treasure. It was of deep red leather, almost of maroon color. It was a Phil Rizutto shortstop mitt. On the top of the glove was the signature of my hero. He played my favored position on the baseball field, and he was small for his age. So was I, a perfect combination to stoke my fantasies. I loved that glove. As I brought the mitt to my face, it brought forth a soft scent, a smell of tanned leather and fantasies of baseball heroics. Breathing in those airs conveyed aromas of double plays.

My new friend followed me into my bedroom where I pulled out Phil's mitt and handed it to him. I offered to loan my new baseball glove to my buddy so we would play catch. I remained oblivious to this situation until my step mom entered the room and whispered in my ear, "I forgot to tell you. He's a midget."

Couldn't my step mom have been a bit more forthcoming about our guests? I turned as red as my baseball glove. My first impressions failed me. My adaptive unconscious failed me. How dull-witted could I be?

After I recovered and went into the living room to silently observe a conversation between midgets and non-midgets, I recall thinking: *How in the world could I have thought this man to be a child?* Upon closer examination, he had stubble on his face. He was wearing wing-tip shoes. Granted, they were small wing-tips, but they were nonetheless, wing-tips.

In Conclusion

Let's try an experiment. For one day, let's think about the impressions we have upon our first encounters with an individual. Let's try giving our first impressions a second thought. Then, consider if our first impressions are the same as our second. I have discovered that often, first impressions don't come close to being accurate.

I have found some of the ugliest people on this earth are the most beautiful people on this earth. Why? Partially because they can't get by on their good looks. They must find other ways to be beautiful.