
The Ugly Truth: Looks Count

Contributed by Matt Katz
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I'd like to sit here and tell you looks don't matter. That "what's on the inside" is all other people value in you. That true love happens in a vacuum filled only with snuggles and cuddles, void whatsoever of receding hairlines and breast sizes.

I'd also like to tell you the women on the *The Girls Next Door*, the reality show about Hugh Hefner's three girlfriends, are hideous because they're cosmetically and surgically altered.

All humans are fixated by both money and sex. Some cultures, like those we tend to go to war with, try to make money and sex as scarce and limited as possible. But in America we combine money and sex, turn it into a reality show and then send parents across America shuffling their kids out of the room when it comes on. (No worries, the kids will catch it later on DVR.)

A show featuring nice blonde women who don't seem to like wearing clothing is fine with me, especially when that show occasionally airs in my living room because my girlfriend, weirdly, finds it amusing.

But the American money-sex machine gets a bit creepy when a T-shirt recently on sale at Abercrombie & Fitch -- a store aimed squarely at the way-under-18 set -- had these words across the front: "Who needs a brain when you have these?"

Part of America thinks Hugh Hefner seems so old and innocent in his robe, could he and his quaint magazine really be that bad? But the rest of America connects Hugh Hefner to Abercrombie to Paris Hilton, because it's really not that much of a stretch, and it scares them so much they stay up at night worrying about their children's future.

The question is whether it's normal that looks -- particularly women's looks -- are pretty much the most important quality an American (particularly a female American) can have. Is this human nature? Or have we just become obsessed with skin?

It has been assumed since Darwin's days that it's natural; that our

brains are hard-wired to find the best-looking mate in order to have attractive -- and therefore most likely to survive -- offspring. We're inherently egomaniacs, and we want to live forever.

Some recent research has confirmed this. The University of Essex studied 84 speed-dating events throughout England and found that every inch of a man's height increased his chances by 5 percent of women wanting to meet him.

Meanwhile, clinically overweight women were picked by 70 percent fewer men than average-sized or clinically underweight women.

Other researchers, according to the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, have found human beauty triggers the same section of the brain activated in drug addicts when they're about to take a hit.

Two-month-old babies have been observed looking longer at more traditionally attractive faces. And mothers of less attractive babies spend a disproportionate time looking at other people in the hospital room instead of their own babies.

But other evidence shows it's not natural at all, that we have artificially inflated the importance of looks. The University of Texas did a study every 10 years and found the value of good looks has increased tremendously for both men and women. In 1989 men's looks were more important to women than women's looks were to men in 1939.

But wait! Men shorter than 6 feet and women over the 100-pound mark can take heart. Biologists have identified a number of animals who don't pick mates based on attractiveness. That peacock with the fancy feathers doesn't necessarily get more peahens than the peacock with the lame feathers, as originally thought.

And other studies show women base their opinion of attractiveness not on looks, but clothing.

Yes, I guess that's still shallow. But at least a nice suit or skirt is cheaper than hair plugs or silicone. And that means you'll have more of what really, truly matters in life and love: ca\$h.

This column appeared in the Courier-Post and Gannett newspapers nationwide.