

PERSPECTIVES

Eye of the Beholder?



Giovanni Salmeria/Emerald

Beauty may be only skin-deep, but it's also an integral part of our future

With our entry into the real world approaching, we're all looking to gain the same things before graduation: practical skills, a solid liberal arts education and a certain independence. College is meant to give us these things — and it can — but it's disheartening to know that one important weapon in the fight for personal and professional success can only be obtained through sheer luck of the gene pool. It's how we look. No matter how much knowledge we soak in, how sparkling

a personality we have or how skilled we are at our chosen career, it's the shape of our face or the dimensions of our body that can give us what we want. Looks do matter.

Recent studies have shown that good-looking people make more money for themselves and their businesses than their average or uncomely colleagues. They're considered more intelligent and healthy by peers and receive lighter jail sentences.

Opinion



Ashley Bach

They, according to the studies, have better relationships with their parents and teachers, more friends and more frequent and better sex with more beautiful partners. Scary, isn't it? Ideally, we'd live in a world that cares little about external appearances and makes judgments based on character and ability. But instead, in addition to race, age, gender and sexual prejudices, we have to deal with what Ralph Nader calls "the only discrimination that's completely ignored in this country" — the canonization of the beautiful and the damning of the ugly.

But are things really this way? Are we really doomed to feel the effects of our looks — good or bad — for the rest of our lives? Unfortunately, yes, although factors such as ability, ambition and personality surely play larger roles. Last time I checked, Bill Gates and Janet Reno weren't exactly hot-ties.

But if you're out looking for the best job or the best mate, your physical features could guarantee your success. Keeping your weight down, having good hair and wearing nice clothes will help, of course, but only to a point. Eventually, you're stuck with what you were born with.

Some people may say that the advantages of beautiful people are obvious. *Of course* they have the most sex. *Of course* they have the most friends. Our society has always been based on beauty, especially with women, so what's new?

I may be an optimist, but I'd like to think we have higher standards.

I'd like to think that we'll get our future jobs based on ability. And that in dating, finding somebody special isn't about good looks, but about finding a compatible equal, both physically and mentally.

Science and personal experience, however, seem to prove me wrong.

This argument still begs the eternal question: Just what is good looking? If we are to assume our livelihood depends in part on our appearance, how do we judge ourselves? How do we know how we measure up?

One answer, apparently, is scientific. In the most subjective of areas, researchers have declared universal truth, regardless of culture or geography. For both sexes, the most attractive faces and bodies are symmetrical, they say. Some scientists say this is Darwinian, showing that we and our ancestors "play it safe" by choosing mates without physical deformities.

More specifically, men with above-average height, prominent cheekbones, a large jaw, muscular torso, imposing brow and a waist-hip ratio of .9 are considered attractive, according to one study. Good-looking women have large eyes, a small nose, full lips, unblemished skin and a waist-hip ratio of .7.

Waist-hip ratio? This all seems patently ridiculous, but people are getting paid to discover these things. I agree there's a level of physical attractiveness that is universal, that everybody will agree on. But the gray area between universal and ugly is virtually infinite.

In the end, maybe we shouldn't let science dictate that most basic of judgments or what we make of ourselves. Perhaps those of us who aren't physically blessed can compensate for our weakness. And those of us with more striking features can develop abilities more valuable than our exterior.

But I'm not confident this will happen, despite my most idealistic tendencies. Until the homely rule the Earth, when we look into a mirror, we may very well be looking into a crystal ball.

Ashley Bach is a columnist for the Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.

Letters to the Editor

A plea for tolerance

I am a student who happens to be multiracial. A student in a classroom targeted me, telling me I had "no right" to speak, saying "You aren't American," and "You people think you need to be on a pedestal above all those other minority people, but you're just like them."

I was singled out because of the color of my skin and one of my ethnicities, Tlingit (Alaskan Native). I recently watched a professor who teaches a multicultural class being disrespected because he was telling a story that an individual didn't believe was true. I have seen messages to professors

with threats and terrible things said about "minority" people in general.

Incidents like this happen to professors and students of color often. I find it scary because these things happen in multicultural courses such as Native American literature or ethnic studies. Racial intimidation is not as uncommon as you think. We need to realize that racism is thriving and breathing here at our own university. We need to do something, and we need to speak out against it. I am not afraid to speak, and I hope my fellow students will also not be afraid.

Students at the University, learn

about people different from you. Respect diversity in the individuals you meet. Try to understand where they are coming from. Maybe you'll learn more about yourself at the same time.

Rachelle Pavao
 Sociology and ethnic studies

Subjective news

I have just finished reading the last Oregon Daily Emerald my hands will ever allow me to pick up. I have become so unbelievably fed up with the pathetic so-called journalism. After more than three years as a reader, I just cannot al-

low my intelligence to be insulted anymore.

First, your paper must be taking notes from the Republican Congress on how to completely ignore the public you represent. Every single day I read the Letters to the Editor and there is almost always a letter telling you to cover more important issues. Today, (ODE, Feb. 23), somebody clearly illustrated that you missed a very important issue: child care. Brian Marlowe, who wrote the letter, I ask you to stop reading the Emerald.

Day after day this paper continuously writes perspectives that correlate solely with Commentator

viewpoints: "Getting cozy with Nike?" (ODE, Feb. 23). Who are you to suggest that the most fervent adversary of Nike, the Student Insurgent, could possibly work for Nike?

I suggest this University and its media learn a lesson from the Clinton trial. The public is tired of partisan BS. We want subjective news!!!!!! And not just five pages of sports. Oh yeah, stop fighting about the election and just let us, the student body, the most important part of any democratic body, decide what should be done. Your former reader,

John Adamson
 International studies