

There are certain practical realities of existence that most of us accept. If you want to catch a bear, you don't load the trap with a copy of *Catch-22*—not unless you rub it with a considerable quantity of raw hamburger. If you want to snag a fish, you can't just slap the water with your hand and yell, "Jump on my hook, already!" Yet, if you're a woman who wants to land a man, there's this notion that you should be able to go around looking like Ernest Borgnine: If you're "beautiful on the inside," that's all that should count. Right. And I should have a flying car and a mansion in Bel Air with servants and a moat.

Welcome to Uglytopia—the world reimagined as a place where it's the content of a woman's character, not her pushup bra, that puts her on the cover of *Maxim*. It just doesn't seem fair to us that some people come into life with certain advantages—whether it's a movie star



chin or a multimillion-dollar shipbuilding inheritance. Maybe we need affirmative action for ugly people; make George Clooney rotate in some homely women between all his gorgeous girlfriends. While we wish things were different, we'd best accept the ugly reality: No man will turn his head to ogle a woman because she looks like the type to buy a turkey sandwich for a homeless man or read to the blind.

There is a vast body of evidence indicating that men and women are biologically and psychologically different, and that what heterosexual men and women want in partners directly corresponds to these differences. The features men evolved to go for in women—youth, clear skin, a symmetrical face and body, feminine facial features, an hourglass figure—are those indicating that a woman would be a healthy, fertile candidate to pass on a man's genes.

These preferences span borders, cultures, and generations, meaning yes, there really are universal standards of beauty. And while Western women do struggle to be slim, the truth is, women in all cultures eat

(or don't) to appeal to "the male gaze." The body size that's idealized in a particular culture appears to correspond to the availability of food. In cultures like ours, where you can't go five miles without passing a 7-Eleven and food is sold by the pallet-load at warehouse grocery stores, thin women are in. In cultures where food is scarce (like in Sahara-adjacent hoods), blubber is beautiful, and women appeal to men by stuffing themselves until they're slim like Jabba the Hut.

Men's looks matter to heterosexual women only somewhat. Most women prefer men who are taller than they are, with symmetrical features (a sign that a potential partner is healthy and parasite-free). But, women across cultures are intent on finding male partners with high status, power, and access to resources—which means a really short guy can add maybe a foot to his height with a private jet. And, just like women who aren't very

attractive, men who make very little money or are chronically out of work tend to have a really hard time finding partners. There is some male grumbling about this. Yet, while feminist journalists deforest North America publishing articles urging women to bow out of the beauty arms race and "Learn to love that woman in the mirror!", nobody gets into the ridiculous position of advising men to "Learn to love that unemployed guy sprawled on the couch!"

Now, before you brand me a traitor to my gender, let me say that I'm all for women having the vote, and I think a woman with a mustache should make the same

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Because Americans are so conflicted and dishonest about the power of beauty, we approach it like novices. At one end of the spectrum are the "Love me as I am!" types.

money as a man with a mustache. But you don't help that woman by advising her, "No need to wax that lip fringe or work off that beer belly!" (Because the road to female empowerment is...looking just like a hairy old man?)

But take *The Beauty Myth* author Naomi Wolf: She contends that standards of beauty are a plot to keep women politically, economically, and sexually subjugated to men—apparently by keeping them too busy curling their eyelashes to have time for political action and too weak from dieting to stand up for what they want in bed. Wolf and her feminist sob sisters bleat about the horror of women being pushed to conform to "Western standards of beauty"—as if eyebrow plucking and getting highlights are the real hardships compared to the walk in the park of footbinding and clitoridectomy. Most insultingly, Wolf paints women who look after

their looks as the dim, passive dupes of Madison Avenue and magazine editors. Apparently, women need only open a page of *Vogue* and they're under its spell—they sleepwalk to Sephora to load up on anti-wrinkle potions, then go on harsh diets, eating only carrots fertilized with butterfly poo.

It turns out that the real beauty myth is the damaging one Wolf and other feminists are perpetuating—the absurd notion that it serves women to thumb their noses at standards of beauty. Of course, looks aren't all that matter (as I'm lectured by female readers of my newspaper column when I point out that male lust seems to have a weight limit). But looks matter a great deal. The more attractive the woman is, the wider her pool of romantic partners and range of opportunities in her work and day-to-day life. We all know this, and numerous studies confirm it—it's just heresy to say so.

We consider it admirable when people strive to better themselves intellectually; we don't say, "Hey, you weren't born a genius, so why ever bother reading a book?" Why should we treat physical appearance any differently? For example, research shows that men prefer women with full lips, smaller chins, and large eyes—indicators of higher levels of estrogen. Some lucky women have big eyes; others just seem to, thanks to the clever application of eyeshadow. As the classic commercial says, "Maybe

