

The Ugly Face of Crime

By Richard Morin
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"I'm too ugly to get a job."

-- Daniel Gallagher, a Miami bank robber, after police captured him in 2003

The hapless Mr. Gallagher may have been ugly, but he was also wise.

Not only are physically unattractive teenagers likely to be stay-at-homes on prom night, they're also more likely to grow up to be criminals, say two economists who tracked the life course of young people from high school through early adulthood.

"We find that unattractive individuals commit more crime in comparison to average-looking ones, and very attractive individuals commit less crime in comparison to those who are average-looking," claim Naci Mocan of the University of Colorado and Erdal Tekin of Georgia State University.

Mocan and Tekin analyzed data from a federally sponsored survey of 15,000 high-schoolers who were interviewed in 1994 and again in 1996 and 2002. One question asked interviewers to rate the physical appearance of the student on a five-point scale ranging from "very attractive" to "very unattractive."

These economists found that the long-term consequences of being young and ugly were small but consistent. Cute guys were uniformly less likely than averages would indicate to have committed seven crimes including burglary and selling drugs, while the unhandsome were consistently more likely to have broken the law.

Very attractive high school girls were less likely to commit six of the seven crimes, while those rated unattractive were more likely to have done six of seven, controlling for personal and family characteristics known to be associated with criminal behavior.

Mocan and Tekin aren't sure why criminals tend to be ugly. Other studies have shown that unattractive men and women are less likely to be hired, and that they earn less money, than the better-looking. Such inferior circumstances may steer some to crime, Mocan and Tekin suggest. They also report that more attractive students have better grades and more polished social skills, which means they graduate with a greater chance of staying out of trouble.

Recalculating Love

Why do men claim to have had so many sex partners while women claim to have so few? The conventional wisdom is that men deliberately inflate their number of lovers while women underreport their dalliances -- the "macho and maiden" hypothesis.

That's mostly wrong, says psychologist Norman R. Brown, a visiting research scientist at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. Most men and women don't intentionally fib about their past partnering. Instead, his studies suggest, men and women use different ways to estimate their number of different partners and this dissimilarity is a major reason men report more lifetime liaisons than women, a statistical impossibility.

"Women are more likely to rely on enumeration" and count up their partners, Brown said -- "a strategy that typically leads to underestimation. Men are twice as likely to use approximation to answer the question. And approximation is a strategy known to produce overestimation."

But men and women still lie about love, Brown said. Fully 21 percent of the men and 15 percent of the women acknowledged at the end of a recent national survey that they had been untruthful about their sexual histories. When he looked at the results just among truth tellers, the average number of partners for men fell from 32 to 16 -- still nearly three times the number claimed by the female truth tellers.

Rough on the Diamond

Baseball celebrity apparently comes with a price: Hall of Fame players die younger than other major-leaguers, claim Ernest Abel and Michael Kruger of Wayne State University.

The researchers compared Hall of Famers to former players of comparable ages who were alive when the stars were inducted into Cooperstown. The superstars died, on average, five years before their less accomplished peers, they reported in *Death Studies*.

Abel and Kruger suggest several reasons America's baseball stars die younger, including the cumulative effect of all those strangers buying them drinks and post-retirement banquets.

Who Would Have Thought? Post-It Notes, Drunks and Elvis Herselvis

* *"Post-It Note Persuasion: A Sticky Influence"* by Randy Garner. *The Journal of Consumer Psychology*. Vol. 15, No. 3. A Sam Houston University professor finds that people were more likely to complete a survey questionnaire and give more complete answers if the researcher attached a Post-it note. The reason: People interpreted the note as a request for a personal favor.

* *"Binge Drinking in the Context of Romantic Relationships"* by Judith L. Fischer, et al. *Addictive Behaviors* Vol. 30, Issue 8. Researchers led by a Texas Tech University professor discover that students who drink too much aren't the best lovers.

* *"Women Who 'Do Elvis': Authenticity, Masculinity and Masquerade"* by Francesca Brittan. Paper to be presented Sunday at the Study of Popular Music conference in Nashville. A Cornell

University researcher studied female Elvis Presley impersonators such as Janice K and Elvis Herselvis and finds them to be "campy, cheeky, and often disturbingly convincing."

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