

Mind-Rain

YOUR FAVORITE AUTHORS ON SCOTT WESTERFELD'S UGLIES SERIES

Edited and Original Introduction by Scott Westerfeld

With Leah Wilson



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INTRODUCTION

Scott Westerfeld

THERE'S AN OLD SAYING that goes like this: "It takes a village to raise a child."

This saying doesn't suggest that parents are unimportant, only that children are hungry little sponges who are shaped by everything around them. They need a lot more than the input of a nuclear family to reach their full potential—they need a community. The larger the world that a child experiences, the more they can become themselves.

Having spent the last five years emailing with, talking to, and lurking on the blogs of Uglies fans, I would humbly submit that it also takes a village to read a book.

Again, this doesn't mean we authors aren't important. We still want the last word in certain kinds of arguments. (That's why it's called *authority*, people!) And we still crave all those fan mails and delicious royalty checks.

But books, like children, are hungry things. They want more than just one spindly author. They want fanfic and fan art and discussion boards and LJ icons cribbed from their covers. In a word, books want *conversations*.

Of course, you guys know this already. You write me all the time to tell in mind-bending detail how you gave the Uglies books to your best friends, who passed it on to their friends, until you had whole cafeteria tables wa-ing and la-ing and generally confusing everyone around them with bubbletalk. So clearly you know the secret of getting the whole village reading.

Because when more people read a book, *the book gets better*.

But why is that, anyway?

Well, part of it is the simple truth of humanity: we're social creatures. We need to talk about our lives, including our friends and families. So why wouldn't we want to talk about the characters and events we know from fiction? Just because they aren't real doesn't mean we can't gossip about them.

But a weird kind of magic happens thanks to all this conversation—it makes a book more real. It rewires your brain a little, nudging you over into a world where bubbletalk and hoverboards are commonplace, and where Tally Youngblood is flesh and blood.

So *this* book, the one you're holding in your hands, is a continuation of that process. It's more of that conversation. Maybe the gossip here has been refined a little (with quotes and references and footnotes!) but its main purpose is the same: to make the Uglies books a little better, and the village a little bigger.

In these pages, our contributors examine the language and slang of Tally's city; plumb the secret life of Shay; compare David with Zane as boyfriend material; look at some Tally-like heroes from myth, literature, and history; ask whether Tally is a hero at all; explore deep questions of beauty; contrast the Prettytime to Japanese culture; review the history of brain and body modification; scrutinize the science of the series; and invite you to join a history class in Aya's world.

In short, all the things you've already been doing around the cafeteria table, just more of it. Because like those little sponge-children, books always want more.

As an added bonus, we've included Ted Chiang's short story "Liking What You See" and Charles Beaumont's classic "The Beautiful People," both of which inspired me to invent Tally's world.

So thanks to all my brave contributors, who took some time off from writing their own wonderful YA to talk about mine. That's a great compliment, always. But mostly thanks to you Ugliers readers out there who talk the bubbletalk, make the fan art, clog the comment threads, and generally spread the word.

Without you guys in the conversation, my job would be about one percent as fun.

All That Glitters Is Not Hovery

Slang, Language, and Identity

Lili Wilkinson

How many of you have ever said “bubbly” or “bogus” or “icy” to an uncomprehending bystander? That’s right, all of you have.

And wasn’t it fun?

Lili Wilkinson is here to tell you why. She thinks it’s because if you’re a teenager, language belongs to you. You’re officially in charge of slang and poetry and song lyrics and nicknames. So it’s no wonder that you’d find a set of books as slang-ridden as the *Uglies* series very brain-infecting.

Away we go.

Teens are generally more interested in language than adults. They produce more slang, more poetry, more neologisms and nicknames, and memorize more song lyrics than their elders. They're still acquiring language in ways that most adults aren't: as a tool for self-definition.

—SCOTT WESTERFELD¹

Shay sometimes talked in a mysterious way, like she was quoting the lyrics of some band no one else listened to. (*Uglies*)

What if you had no control over your body? The way you looked, what you wore? How your brain worked? How would you still know that you were you?

When you see me, how do you know I'm me, and not someone else?

There's how I look, where I live, what I wear. What I listen to, read, watch.

And there's the way I talk.

I live in Melbourne, Australia. Here, when you blow off fifth period and go shopping, you're *wagging*. When I give someone a dirty look, I'm giving them a *greasy*. In Adelaide, 1,000 kilometres away, *wagging* is *cutting*, and *greasies* are *daggers*.

Where I live, carbonated beverages are called soft drinks, not pop or fizz or soda. We sleep under a doona, not a duvet or comforter, and eat capsicums, not bell peppers. We travel in lifts, not elevators, and the storage compartment at the back of our cars is called the boot, not the trunk.

Sometimes only a single letter is different—like the way we have maths classes and the U.S. has math classes. You wouldn't think a single letter could tell you much about a person, would you? But it does.

¹ Interview at slayground.livejournal.com/113442.html

These things mark me as Australian, and that's a big part of my identity. But the language I use isn't just about where I come from.

Do you write *please* or *plz* or *pls*? When you sign off an e-mail, do you say *love and other indoor sports*, or *with love and hugs* or *xxxxxxxxoxoxoxo* or *kthxbai*?

All of these things shape who you are, make you different from the people around you. I can tell my dad is over fifty, because he says *groovy* and uses the phrase *surfing the net*. *cringe*

The language that Tally uses in the *Uglies* series is what makes her come alive. Especially the slang she uses. Westerfeld is very careful not to use current slang in his work, for fear of his books dating too quickly or trying too hard. “Slang,” he says, “is like a fish. Good when it's fresh or when it's old, a fossil. But in between is a nasty period, something you don't want at all.”²

Tally's slang is a mix of fresh-fish and fossils, bits and pieces, from the 1920s slang of Evelyn Waugh (*bogus* and the *-making* suffix, like *shy-making* and *happy-making*), to entirely new words like *surge* and *hovercam*. And some of the things she says are very familiar to me—*littlies*, *crumbliies*, and *SpagBol* are all Australianisms.

It's a hard line to walk, the line between slang that's original—different enough to signal to the reader that this future world we're in is not like ours—and natural-sounding, like real live people use it every day.³

Westerfeld describes it as “slang from 20 minutes in the future from the next town over; slang that's a little bit off but hangs together.”

² Interview at slayground.livejournal.com/113442.html

³ Other times this has worked really well is the use of the word *smeg* in British comedy sci-fi *Red Dwarf*, and *frak* in *Battlestar Galactica*, which was such a successful four-letter-word that you can also find it popping up in other TV shows, like *Veronica Mars* and *Gilmore Girls*.

“The street finds its own uses for things.”

—Gibson’s Law

That phrase could just have easily been “teenagers find their own uses for things.” Teenagers are the masters of re-appropriation and remixing.

Two examples:

1. SMS was in mobile phones for a long time before anybody thought to use it. The telcos thought it might be useful for letting customers know they had voicemail, but didn’t consider that it could be used for person-to-person communication. In 1995, the average mobile phone user sent three text messages per year. Now, 1.5 billion texts are sent each week in the U.S., and most of them by teenagers.

Adults didn’t realize the potency of SMS. The telcos didn’t foresee it either. It was teenagers who recognized the potential of texting, and turned it into an industry that rakes in more than triple the returns of Hollywood.

2. In 2005, some nefarious entrepreneur came up with a great product: an ultrasonic teenager repellent to stop kids from loitering outside shops or train stations. It was basically a speaker emitting a really annoying high-pitched noise that only the fresh young ears of teenagers could detect. Nice, huh? Well, the teenagers had the last laugh—someone made an MP3 of the sound and started using it as a mobile ringtone. Suddenly teens could receive calls and texts in class without their teachers noticing.

In the Uglies world, Tally and her friends remix stuff too—they find alternate uses for bungee jackets, hoverboards, and hoverball rigs. They start fashion trends to disguise their rebellion, use vodka to melt ice and create havoc, and disguise syringes as broadcasting

devices. The Sly Girls in *Extras* are also experts at hacking the system—surfing the mag-lev trains and using the mass driver to fling them up out of the mountain so they can skydive.

But these characters don't just appropriate and find uses for *things*. They also do it with *language*.

“And then I saw your face on the newsfeeds, Tally. All wide-eyed and innocent and telling your *bubbly* little tale.” (*Pretties*)

Isn't it just totally cringe-making when adults try to use slang? Like when your Great Uncle Pete tries to talk like you? When he assures you he's a *fully sick, groovy dude*? It hurts, doesn't it?

The adults in Tally's world don't use slang. When they do, it's self-conscious, like the example above, when Dr Cable is mocking Tally.

Slang belongs to teenagers. Teenagers invent it, reinvent it, keep it fresh. It's teenagers who decide what's cool, and what is so over.

Sure, sometimes slang gets absorbed into our general language—like *cool* and *awesome*, or *littlies* and *crumblied* in Tally's world—but on the whole, it's all about the teenagers. Slang belongs to teenagers, because *teenagers love language*. And they love *playing* with language (usually much to the horror of their parents/teachers). It was teenagers who popularized text-speak and 733t. Everyone writes poetry when they're a teenager. Everyone obsessively memorizes song lyrics. Everyone writes letters and invents secret codes and funny nicknames and creative handles.

Part of the appeal of using slang is being able to have a secret language for just you and your friends. The idea of cliques is one that's very prominent in the *Uglies* series—from the reasonably “normal” Jocks, Crims, Twisters, and Swarmers in *Pretties* to the sheer craziness of *Extras*: Tech-heads, Manga-heads, Reputation Bombers, Pixel-skins, the NeoFoodies (who “made ice cream with liquid

nitrogen, and injected flavors into weird forms of matter”), and of course the Sly Girls, and the followers of Radical Honesty, who have brain-surge to make them only speak the truth.

And all these cliques have their own bits of slang, words and sayings that make them unique. Imagine for a minute that you’d never read any of the books, and you overheard somebody say, “Tally-wa, you are so missing. Didn’t you get the ping?” (*Pretties*). You’d have no idea what they were talking about. Or what about, “Bubbly is *not* bogus, lazy-face”? (*Pretties*).

Tally’s journey from ugly to pretty to special and then out the other side is not just a physical journey. It’s also a journey through language, as Tally takes on the slang of her various new cliques and then slowly comes to realize that when your body keeps changing, sometimes the way you speak is the only piece of *you* that you can hold on to.

At the beginning of *Uglies*, all Tally wants is to be pretty. She creates endless morphological models of what she might look like after the operation, she sneaks across the river into New Pretty Town to look at the pretties, and spends all her time thinking about being one—the clothes, the parties, the perfect faces.

Uglies’ slang is . . . ugly. It’s all about giving people nicknames that highlight their ugliness—*Skinny*, *Squint*. As Tally says, “Better dead than ugly.”

When Tally leaves the city and visits the Smoke, she starts to reassess. Especially when she finds out the truth about being pretty—that it makes you brain-missing. But of course, as soon as Tally thinks she’s chosen the clique where she belongs—the Smokies—everything goes horribly wrong and Tally is dragged back to the city, where all her dreams come true and she is finally made pretty.

But Tally doesn’t make a very good pretty. She isn’t docile or passive—she’s a Crim.

The Crims dare to be bubbly—aware, bright, and fizzing, like champagne. Being “pretty” isn’t something to aspire to

anymore—*prettyheads* are docile, innocent, malleable, stupid. Like sheep. It's all about being bubbly now.

But like champagne, there's still plenty of fun in being bubbly—the awakesness that you get from being bubbly is channeled into pulling pranks, bucking the system, and partying hard.

By the time we get to *Specials*, Tally is sneering at the Crims. Now they're *bubbleheads*, like children playing at being grown-up. Now that Tally is special, she's *icy*. Where champagne is fizzy and bubbly and fun, ice is cold, hard, clear, and sharp. Being icy is not about having fun. Iciness is dangerous. There isn't much room in iciness for love, and that's where Tally gets herself into trouble.

“I’m not sure *what* I am anymore, Zane. Sometimes I think I’m nothing but what other people have done to me—a big collection of brain-washing, surgeries and cures.” She looked down at her scarred hand, the tattoos flickering brokenly across her palm. “That, and all the mistakes I’ve made. All the people I’ve disappointed.” (*Specials*)

Tally's body is constantly changing (much like a real teenager's body does)—going from ugly to pretty to Crim to special to . . . whatever she is at the end of the series. How much of Tally's body is really *hers* and not just smart plastic and ceramic bone? If even her brain is being operated on, then how does Tally stay Tally? How do we know, as readers, that it's still her in there? That she hasn't become *totally* pretty, or *totally* special?

Through her use of language. Through the things she says, the way she speaks, the slang she uses. When your brain, body, and lifestyle are in a constant state of change,⁴ language is your

⁴ Do you see what Scott did there? With Tally and all the surgery and change as a metaphor for adolescence? Isn't he clever?

Best Friends for Never

Robin Wasserman

When I'm talking to Uglies fans I often ask this question: "Who here hates Shay?" Invariably a lot of hands go up—not all, but a surprising number. Then I ask all those Shay-haters, "Can you imagine the story from Shay's point of view?" And their eyes start to cross as they remember the confidences betrayed, the disasters created, and the boyfriends stolen by . . . Tally Youngblood.

Unfortunately, I've never had time to completely rewrite the series from Shay's point of view. I think it would be eye-opening for those of you with your hands up. But Robin Wasserman's essay makes me think that someday I may just have to.

For you Shay-haters, reading what follows is going to be a bumpy ride, but trust me, it will rewire your brain in a bubbly-making way. And for those of you who always keep your hands down, it'll make you love Tally's long-suffering sidekick even more.

*This whole game is just designed to make
us hate ourselves.*

—SHAY, IN *UGLIES*

I AM A NATURAL born sidekick.

I say this with neither pride nor shame. It's just a fact of my life that for every time I've been the star, there have been approximately 8 million more times that I've been the planet, circling in orbit around someone else's bright flame.

Because I've been there myself, I pay closer attention than most to the girl behind the curtain. So I can admit, after close analysis, that in many ways Shay is the perfect sidekick for Tally Youngblood. In the tradition of all the greatest sidekicks (*cf.* Dr. Watson, Paris Geller, Mr. Smithers, Chewbacca), Shay's overlooked and undervalued. And no matter what Tally does, Shay forgives her. She gets mad, she gets even—and then she comes back for more. She's the wind beneath Tally's wings. She's a friend in deed to a friend in need. In good times, in bad times, Tally can always count on her, for sure, because that's what friends are—

Well, you get the idea.

Just one problem with this neat equation: Shay's not sidekick material. She obviously *thinks* she is. But Shay, who's right about so much, is wrong about this. She's not a sidekick, she's a hero.

A hero with the misfortune to be trapped in someone else's story.

Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Better . . . Not That Anyone Cares

We've all known girls like Shay, right? She's that annoying kid on the playground, the one tagging along where she's not wanted, convinced that you're BFFs . . . and then, when you burst her little

bubble with a harsh prick of reality, she's the one who rats you out to the playground monitors the first chance she gets. Shay is the girl who won't take no for an answer, the reason you have caller ID. If you're her friend, you're her property. If you're her enemy? Watch out. You know that woman scorned you're always hearing about? Her name is Shay.

Case closed, right?

Wrong. Here's the thing about Shay: All that stuff you think you know about her? It's total crap.

Because here's the *other* thing about Shay: She's awesome.

Not just awesome. More awesome than Tally. Not to mention smarter, savvier, sassier, braver, and bolder. Basically, she's Tally-er than Tally. Not that it gets her anywhere. Let's recap the events in this series, from Shay's perspective: Shay blazes a trail for Tally, right up the side of a mountain. Shay extends a hand to Tally, and helps her to the summit. Shay and Tally admire the view, for approximately thirty seconds.

Then Tally pushes Shay over the cliff.

Lather, rinse, and repeat. (And don't forget to get a little shampoo in your eyes, for that extra-fun burning sensation.)

.....

Let's start with Shay's brain. Her big, bubbly brain, the one always digging for explanations in situations where other people (like, say, *Tally*) are content to kick back, munch on some SpagBol, and let the world pass them by. From the start, it's obvious that Shay is more on the ball than your average ugly. When we first meet her, she's far trickier than Tally. She knows how to hoverboard and, more importantly, knows that hoverboarding is the best route to freedom. Unlike Tally, who's content to just enjoy technology without wondering how or why it works, Shay also understands the hoverboard mechanism. She knows how to trick its safety governor; she gets

that it needs iron to run and understands how that affects where you can and cannot fly.

Shay knows it all—and she shares it with Tally, setting the tone for the rest of their relationship. Again and again, Shay figures things out and then explains them to her best friend. Not just small things, like how hoverboards work, but big things, like how society works. *Shay* is the one who sees through the pretty lie, back when she and Tally are still uglies. True, she probably didn't figure it out for herself—she learned the truth from David. (This was back when David still acknowledged her existence.) But she gets points for recognizing truth when she hears it—unlike Tally, who hears everything Shay has to say, but chooses not to listen.

Similarly, Shay paves the way for Tally in Prettytown, encouraging her to be exactly the kind of bubbly Crim that Zane is looking for. Then, while Tally is off playing games with Zane, forgetting (not for the first time) that she even has a best friend, *Shay* thinks her way out of pretty-mindedness all on her own. Tally needs Zane to help her stay bubbly; Shay needs only herself. Tally says it best: “If Shay was hacking minders and scaling the Valentino tower, she was way ahead of the rest of them” (*Pretties*).

By the time they've both become specials, Tally has fallen embarrassingly far behind. It's not just that Shay is better at being a special—after all, she's had more time than Tally to get used to her new life. But her superiority doesn't stem from experience, or—as Tally assumes—a biological inclination toward special-dom. Shay is just smarter. *She's* the one who comes up with the plan to break Zane out of the city, and she's got every contingency covered. Poor, slow Tally is always one step behind. Take the Armory break-in: It's Shay's idea from start to finish. (Granted, this doesn't turn out to be for the best in the long run, but it's the only plan they've got.) As the action progresses, it's *Shay* who figures out why her

city is attacking Diego, and what needs to be done to stop the war. Again and again, Shay just *knows*—and when she doesn't know, she asks.¹ Which is the smartest move of all.

.....

Okay, enough, you may be thinking. So Shay's got a high IQ. So what? She talks a good game, but what's it all worth without a little action? A good ass-kicking's worth a thousand words, right? And maybe you think Shay couldn't kick her way through a paper wall.

Maybe your name is David. Or Zane.

"Don't tell me Shay actually rescued you," Zane says, his voice dripping with derision, when Tally reveals the real story behind the collapse of the Smoke and her return to Prettytown. How laughable, his tone says, that Shay could dream of doing such a thing!

As if Shay hadn't proven herself to be every inch the brave, independent action hero that Tally's made out to be. Let's not forget that at the beginning of *Uglies*, when Shay and Tally are both equally alone in Uglyville, missing all their friends, it's *Shay* who does something about it. Yes, Tally sneaks across the river—*once*—to see Peris. And she whines about it the entire way. Poor Tally, forced to do a trick without an adoring boy to applaud as she pulls it off. Shay, on the other hand, has been visiting Prettytown on her own for quite a while. She's got a plan—*escape*—and she's searching for a partner to help her carry it off. Tally, despite being just as lonely, spends most of her time gazing out the window, mooning about all the things she

¹ Now, we rarely if ever get to see Shay track down the answers she hungers for (except for the several noteworthy confrontations she has with Tally, desperate for the truth), but Shay's breadth of knowledge (about hoverboards; about the mores of the city; about the Armory, from the inside out) is proof enough that, off-screen, she's busy digging deep for answers. This is a society that depends on no one caring enough to ask questions; it's no wonder Shay always finds herself the odd man out.

wants but can't have (and this is Tally we're talking about, so it's an absurdly short list).

In the Smoke, Shay works the hardest, always choosing the nastiest jobs for herself. And once Special Circumstances arrive, Shay fights back with such tenacity that she's the first victim of the pretty operation. It's not the first time that Shay's greatest strength becomes her greatest weakness—but we'll get to that later. Because I'd hate to get distracted from the most crucial point of all, the one that none of Shay's friends and enemies can seem to remember: *Shay seeks out the Smoke on her own.*

The very thing that Tally *pretends* to do—while in reality being blackmailed by Dr. Cable—Shay actually *does*. This isn't just brave. It's the bravest act in the entire series.²

The Smoke proves to runaways that there's an alternative to turning pretty. Once you've seen the Smoke, you know you have a choice. After that, *making* the choice—staying—seems like the easy part. But before you've seen the Smoke, before your friends tell you what it's like, the only world you can truly rely on is the one you grew up in. Anything beyond that is a fuzzy mixture of hope and fantasy.

But with nothing more to go on than the word of some stranger she's met in the wilderness—and her own inner certainty that the pretty operation is wrong—Shay turns her back on everything she's ever known. She walks away from her life, from her new best friend, from everything certain and easy. She jumps blindfolded into the abyss, and she does it without looking back.

² Wait a minute, you say. Shay didn't flee to the Smoke because she was *brave*, she fled because she had a crush on David. And how do we know this? Because . . . well . . . *David told us so*. But outside of David's (self-serving) claims, there's no evidence that Shay was running *toward* David rather than *away* from being pretty. But David wouldn't lie, right? Well, we'll get to that sooner or later. Probably sooner.

And what does she get for her trouble?

Nothing.

Actually, worse than nothing: Her boyfriend insults her, then dumps her for her best friend—insisting it's not because he's fickle, it's because Shay sucks, while Tally's awesomeness is just too overwhelming to deny.

.....

It's hard to miss the fact that Tally is awesome. After all, every character tells us so. Dr. Cable, of all people, kicks things off for us in *Uglies*:

“But then Shay disappeared,” Dr. Cable continued. “She turned out to be trickier than her friends. You taught her well.”

“I did?” Tally cried. “I don't know any more tricks than most uglies.”

“You underestimate yourself,” Dr. Cable said.

Right. Except for the part where she doesn't. When it comes to Shay, Tally doesn't know more tricks, she knows fewer. But Dr. Cable has spoken. *You taught her well*, she says, and labors under this misapprehension for the rest of the series. Tally is the ringleader, the troublemaker, while Shay just goes along for the ride (perhaps towed behind Tally on the hoverboard *Shay* taught her to ride).

Pretties begins on a similar note: It's Shay who comes up with the idea to dress as Smokies for the costume bash, but is Zane impressed? No, because lucky Tally still has her sweater from the Smoke. You may think that owning a sweater isn't much of a character-defining quality; Zane's not so sure. “I've been waiting for someone like you for a long time,” he tells Tally in their first real conversation. “At least you took the chance, Tally,” he says, referring to her far-from-voluntary trip to the Smoke. “You were brave enough to find out for yourself.”

Liking What You See: A Documentary

Ted Chiang

If you look at the copyright page of *Uglies*, you'll see a small note at the top: "This novel was shaped by a series of e-mail exchanges between myself and Ted Chiang about his story 'Liking What You See: A Documentary.' His input on the manuscript was also invaluable."

Yes, that's all true. The story you're about to read is where the idea for the *Uglies* series started to bubble.

It's about a private boarding school whose approach to beauty is, in a way, the exact opposite of the *Pretty* system. Yes, everyone gets an operation, but not one that changes the way you look or think, but the way you *see*. No one at this school can tell whether their classmates are pretty or ugly; the part of their brain that detects human beauty has simply been switched off. So the result is the same as in *Uglies*—everyone is equal (but without the bubbleheads). Until, of course, they leave the protected environment of the school, and have to face the real world.

So here's the story that started it all. If you're an *Uglies* fan, don't forget that you owe some thanks to Ted, whose brilliant work is an inspiration to us all.

Beauty is the promise of happiness.

—STENDHAL

Tamera Lyons, 1st-year student at Pembleton:

I can't believe it. I visited the campus last year, and I didn't hear a word about this. Now I get here and it turns out people want to make calli a requirement. One of the things I was looking forward to about college was getting rid of this, you know, so I could be like everybody else. If I'd known there was even a chance I'd have to keep it, I probably would've picked another college. I feel like I've been scammed.

I turn eighteen next week, and I'm getting my calli turned off that day. If they vote to make it a requirement, I don't know what I'll do; maybe I'll transfer, I don't know. Right now I feel like going up to people and telling them, "vote no." There's probably some campaign I can work for.

Maria deSouza, 3rd-year student, President of the Students for Equality Everywhere (SEE):

Our goal is very simple. Pembleton University has a Code of Ethical Conduct, one that was created by the students themselves, and that all incoming students agree to follow when they enroll. The initiative that we've sponsored would add a provision to the code, requiring students to adopt callignosia as long as they're enrolled.

What prompted us to do this now was the release of a spex version of Visage. That's the software that, when you look at people through your spex, shows you what they'd look like with cosmetic surgery. It became a form of entertainment among a certain crowd, and a lot of college students found it offensive. When people started talking about it as a symptom of a deeper societal problem, we thought the timing was right for us to sponsor this initiative.

The deeper societal problem is lookism. For decades people've been willing to talk about racism and sexism, but they're still reluctant to talk about lookism. Yet this prejudice against unattractive people is incredibly pervasive. People do it without even being taught by anyone, which is bad enough, but instead of combating this tendency, modern society actively reinforces it.

Educating people, raising their awareness about this issue, all of that is essential, but it's not enough. That's where technology comes in. Think of calliagnosia as a kind of assisted maturity. It lets you do what you know you should: ignore the surface, so you can look deeper.

We think it's time to bring calli into the mainstream. So far the calli movement has been a minor presence on college campuses, just another one of the special-interest causes. But Pembleton isn't like other colleges, and I think the students here are ready for calli. If the initiative succeeds here, we'll be setting an example for other colleges, and ultimately, society as a whole.

Joseph Weingartner, neurologist:

The condition is what we call an associative agnosia, rather than an apperceptive one. That means it doesn't interfere with one's visual perception, only with the ability to recognize what one sees. A calliagnosic perceives faces perfectly well; he or she can tell the difference between a pointed chin and a receding one, a straight nose and a crooked one, clear skin and blemished skin. He or she simply doesn't experience any aesthetic reaction to those differences.

Calliagnosia is possible because of the existence of certain neural pathways in the brain. All animals have criteria for evaluating the reproductive potential of prospective mates, and they've evolved neural "circuitry" to recognize those criteria. Human social interaction is centered around our faces, so our circuitry is most finely

attuned to how a person's reproductive potential is manifested in his or her face. You experience the operation of that circuitry as the feeling that a person is beautiful, or ugly, or somewhere in between. By blocking the neural pathways dedicated to evaluating those features, we can induce calliagnosia.

Given how much fashions change, some people find it hard to imagine that there are absolute markers of a beautiful face. But it turns out that when people of different cultures are asked to rank photos of faces for attractiveness, some very clear patterns emerge across the board. Even very young infants show the same preference for certain faces. This lets us identify the traits that are common to everyone's idea of a beautiful face.

Probably the most obvious one is clear skin. It's the equivalent of a bright plumage in birds or a shiny coat of fur in mammals. Good skin is the single best indicator of youth and health, and it's valued in every culture. Acne may not be serious, but it *looks* like more serious diseases, and that's why we find it disagreeable.

Another trait is symmetry; we may not be conscious of millimeter differences between someone's left and right sides, but measurements reveal that individuals rated as most attractive are also the most symmetrical. And while symmetry is what our genes always aim for, it's very difficult to achieve in developmental terms; any environmental stressor—like poor nutrition, disease, parasites—tends to result in asymmetry during growth. Symmetry implies resistance to such stressors.

Other traits have to do with facial proportions. We tend to be attracted to facial proportions that are close to the population mean. That obviously depends on the population you're part of, but being near the mean usually indicates genetic health. The only departures from the mean that people consistently find attractive are ones caused by sex hormones, which suggest good reproductive potential.

Basically, calliagnosia is a lack of response to these traits; nothing more. Calliagnosics are *not* blind to fashion or cultural standards of beauty. If black lipstick is all the rage, calliagnosia won't make you forget it, although you might not notice the difference between pretty faces and plain faces wearing that lipstick. And if everyone around you sneers at people with broad noses, you'll pick up on that.

So calliagnosia by itself can't eliminate appearance-based discrimination. What it does, in a sense, is even up the odds; it takes away the innate predisposition, the tendency for such discrimination to arise in the first place. That way, if you want to teach people to ignore appearances, you won't be facing an uphill battle. Ideally you'd start with an environment where everyone's adopted calliagnosia, and then socialize them to not value appearances.

Tamera Lyons:

People here have been asking me what it was like going to Saybrook, growing up with calli. To be honest, it's not a big deal when you're young; you know, like they say, whatever you grew up with seems normal to you. We knew that there was something that other people could see that we couldn't, but it was just something we were curious about.

For instance, my friends and I used to watch movies and try to figure out who was really good-looking and who wasn't. We'd say we could tell, but we couldn't really, not by looking at their faces. We were just going by who was the main character and who was the friend; you always knew the main character was better-looking than the friend. It's not true a hundred percent of the time, but you could usually tell if you were watching the kind of thing where the main character wouldn't be good-looking.

It's when you get older that it starts to bother you. If you hang

out with people from other schools, you can feel weird because you have calli and they don't. It's not that anyone makes a big deal out of it, but it reminds you that there's something you can't see. And then you start having fights with your parents, because they're keeping you from seeing the real world. You never get anywhere with them, though.

Richard Hamill, founder of the Saybrook School:

Saybrook came about as an outgrowth of our housing cooperative. We had maybe two dozen families at the time, all trying to establish a community based on shared values. We were holding a meeting about the possibility of starting an alternative school for our kids, and one parent mentioned the problem of the media's influence on the children. Everyone's teens were asking for cosmetic surgery so they could look like fashion models. The parents were doing their best, but you can't isolate your kids from the world; they live in an image-obsessed culture.

It was around then that the last legal challenges to calliagnosia were resolved, and we got to talking about it. We saw calli as an opportunity: What if we could live in an environment where people didn't judge each other on their appearance? What if we could raise our children in such an environment?

The school started out being just for the children of the families in the cooperative, but other calliagnosia schools began making the news, and before long people were asking if they could enroll their kids without joining the housing co-op. Eventually we set up Saybrook as a private school separate from the co-op, and one of its requirements was that parents adopt calliagnosia for as long as their kids were enrolled. Now a calliagnosia community has sprung up here, all because of the school.

Rachel Lyons:

Tamera's father and I gave the issue a lot of thought before we decided to enroll her there. We talked to people in the community, found we liked their approach to education, but really it was visiting the school that sold me.

Saybrook has a higher than normal number of students with facial abnormalities, like bone cancer, burns, congenital conditions. Their parents moved here to keep them from being ostracized by other kids, and it works. I remember when I first visited, I saw a class of twelve-year-olds voting for class president, and they elected this girl who had burn scars on one side of her face. She was wonderfully at ease with herself, she was popular among kids who probably would have ostracized her in any other school. And I thought, this is the kind of environment I want my daughter to grow up in.

Girls have always been told that their value is tied to their appearance; their accomplishments are always magnified if they're pretty and diminished if they're not. Even worse, some girls get the message that they can get through life relying on just their looks, and then they never develop their minds. I wanted to keep Tamera away from that sort of influence.

Being pretty is fundamentally a passive quality; even when you work at it, you're working at being passive. I wanted Tamera to value herself in terms of what she could *do*, both with her mind and with her body, not in terms of how decorative she was. I didn't want her to be passive, and I'm pleased to say that she hasn't turned out that way.

Martin Lyons:

I don't mind if Tamera decides as an adult to get rid of calli. This was never about taking choices away from her. But there's more than

enough stress involved in simply getting through adolescence; the peer pressure can crush you like a paper cup. Becoming preoccupied with how you look is just one more way to be crushed, and anything that can relieve that pressure is a good thing, in my opinion.

Once you're older, you're better equipped to deal with the issue of personal appearance. You're more comfortable in your own skin, more confident, more secure. You're more likely to be satisfied with how you look, whether you're "good looking" or not. Of course not everyone reaches that level of maturity at the same age. Some people are there at sixteen, some don't get there until they're thirty or even older. But eighteen's the age of legal majority, when everyone's got the right to make their own decisions, and all you can do is trust your child and hope for the best.

Tamera Lyons:

It'd been kind of an odd day for me. Good, but odd. I just got my calli turned off this morning.

Getting it turned off was easy. The nurse stuck some sensors on me and made me put on this helmet, and she showed me a bunch of pictures of people's faces. Then she tapped at her keyboard for a minute, and said, "I've switched off the calli," just like that. I thought you might feel something when it happened, but you don't. Then she showed me the pictures again, to make sure it worked.

When I looked at the faces again, some of them seemed . . . different. Like they were glowing, or more vivid or something. It's hard to describe. The nurse showed me my test results afterwards, and there were readings for how wide my pupils were dilating and how well my skin conducted electricity and stuff like that. And for the faces that seemed different, the readings went way up. She said those were the beautiful faces.

She said that I'd notice how other people's faces look right away, but it'd take a while before I had any reaction to how I looked. Supposedly you're too used to your face to tell.

And yeah, when I first looked in a mirror, I thought I looked totally the same. Since I got back from the doctor's, the people I see on campus definitely look different, but I still haven't noticed any difference in how I look. I've been looking at mirrors all day. For a while I was afraid that I was ugly, and any minute the ugliness was going to appear, like a rash or something. And so I've been staring at the mirror, just waiting, and nothing's happened. So I figure I'm probably not really ugly, or I'd have noticed it, but that means I'm not really pretty either, because I'd have noticed that too. So I guess that means I'm absolutely plain, you know? Exactly average. I guess that's okay.

Joseph Weingartner:

Inducing an agnosia means simulating a specific brain lesion. We do this with a programmable pharmaceutical called neurostat; you can think of it as a highly selective anesthetic, one whose activation and targeting are all under dynamic control. We activate or deactivate the neurostat by transmitting signals through a helmet the patient puts on. The helmet also provides somatic positioning information so the neurostat molecules can triangulate their location. This lets us activate only the neurostat in a specific section of brain tissue, and keep the nerve impulses there below a specified threshold.

Neurostat was originally developed for controlling seizures in epileptics and for relief of chronic pain; it lets us treat even severe cases of these conditions without the side-effects caused by drugs that affect the entire nervous system. Later on, different neurostat protocols were developed as treatments for obsessive-compulsive disorder, addictive behavior, and various other disorders. At the

same time, neurostat became incredibly valuable as a research tool for studying brain physiology.

One way neurologists have traditionally studied specialization of brain function is to observe the deficits that result from various lesions. Obviously, this technique is limited because the lesions caused by injury or disease often affect multiple functional areas. By contrast, neurostat can be activated in the tiniest portion of the brain, in effect simulating a lesion so localized that it would never occur naturally. And when you deactivate the neurostat, the “lesion” disappears and brain function returns to normal.

In this way neurologists were able to induce a wide variety of agnosias. The one most relevant here is prosopagnosia, the inability to recognize people by their faces. A prosopagnosic can't recognize friends or family members unless they say something; he can't even identify his own face in a photograph. It's not a cognitive or perceptual problem; prosopagnosics can identify people by their hairstyle, clothing, perfume, even the way they walk. The deficit is restricted purely to faces.

Prosopagnosia has always been the most dramatic indication that our brains have a special “circuit” devoted to the visual processing of faces; we look at faces in a different way than we look at anything else. And recognizing someone's face is just one of the face-processing tasks we do; there are also related circuits devoted to identifying facial expressions, and even detecting changes in the direction of another person's gaze.

One of the interesting things about prosopagnosics is that while they can't recognize a face, they still have an opinion as to whether it's attractive or not. When asked to sort photos of faces in order of attractiveness, prosopagnosics sorted the photos in pretty much the same way as anyone else. Experiments using neurostat allowed researchers to identify the neurological circuit responsible for perceiving beauty in faces, and thus essentially invent calliagnosia.

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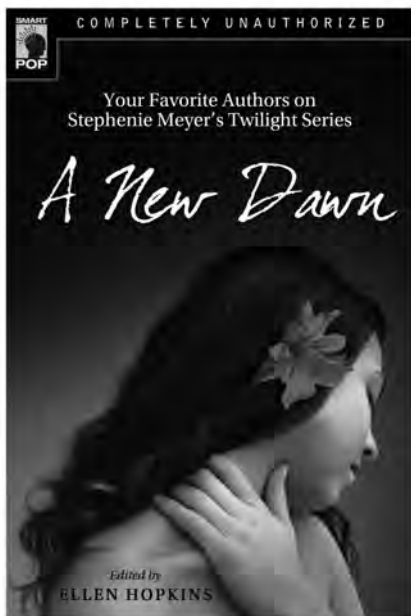
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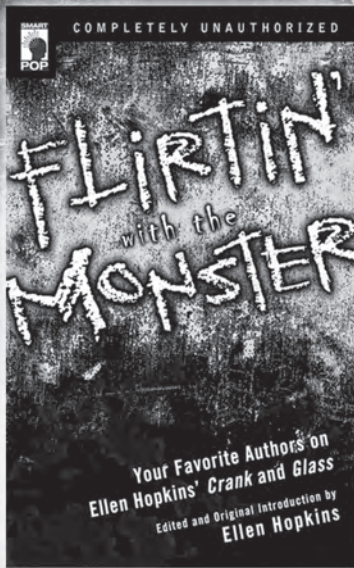
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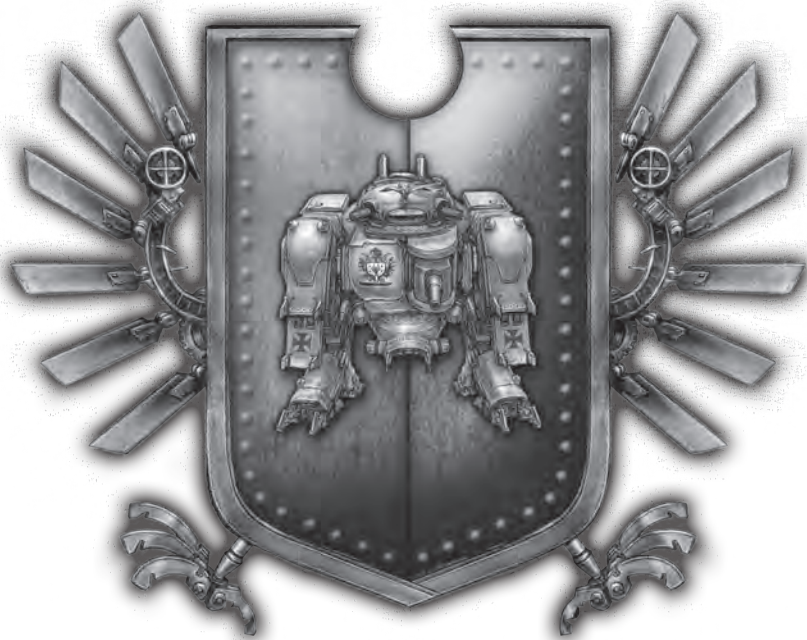
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