

THE JOURNAL OF NUCLEAR MEDICINE (ISSN 0161-5505) is published monthly by The Society of Nuclear Medicine, Inc., 136 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016-6760. Second Class Postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. *Postmaster*, send address changes to *The Journal of Nuclear Medicine*, 136 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016-6760.

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Beauty and the Beholder

The mind can only see what it is prepared to see.

Edward De Bono

Where you stand depends on where you sit.

Anonymous

The scene looks different to each of us. The complexities are evident to some, the simplicity to others. In addition to the level of detail, appreciation of the scene changes with disposition. Beauty, for example, is in the eyes of the beholder. But the beholder's perspective of beauty may vary from day to day. As with other stimuli, beauty is only appreciated when the beholder's beauty receptors are stimulated. The beauty receptors probably respond to a combination of learned and inborn characteristics. For visual stimuli, it may be curve and line; for others it may be color. To further complicate the issue, it appears that beauty receptors can be regulated up or down by promoter or repressor influences, thus allowing a response to different levels of stimulation. This may explain why the sunrise that was so beautiful yesterday can seem ho-hum today. While the exact mechanisms involved in these processes have not been identified, it appears that certain conditions permit better expression of this receptor than others.

In a bold attempt to isolate the "beauty appreciation" gene, a high-resolution tracer study is planned in which subjects will view beautiful objects while undergoing continuous total-body imaging with a variety of genetic probes. We know that selected stimuli bring more receptors, increase their affinity or both—resulting in enhanced beauty appreciation. A potential side benefit of this leading edge research is the identification of the enzyme systems involved in producing the warm, fuzzy feeling of a job well done. Perhaps this work can even identify the love gene.

Stimulus and response are part of the human condition. What is perceived depends on the status of the receptors and the intensity of the stimulus. How we deal with the data is determined by perspective. By putting all these influences into the pot and stirring well, it is easy to see how the same situation may be wonderful or terrible, depending on how we feel.

H. William Strauss, Editor
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